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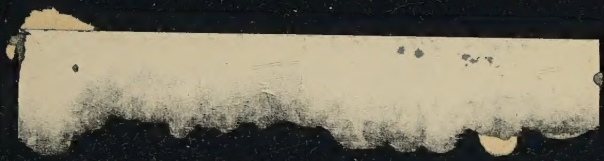

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UNTO THE UTTERMOST.

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BY

JAMES M. CAMPBELL

"With the LORD there is mercy, and with him there is *plenteous redemption.*"

—PSALM CXXX. 7.

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PREFACE.

Of the things contained in the following pages, this is the sum:—that the rainbow of divine propitiousness overarches every life; that this redeemed earth is to all who dwell upon it the footstool of mercy; that plenitude of redeeming power has, by the hand of the Crucified, been lodged in the world's heart; that divine grace is mightier than human sin; that beneath the vilest sinner the ever-present Christ puts the saving strength of his atoning love to lift him up into the sunlight of pardon and purity; that the line of limitation in human redemption is drawn by man himself, not by God; that all sin involves eternal loss, all righteousness eternal gain; that the freedom of man as a moral being, and his consequent responsibility to God, continue for ever under conditions which render response to every moral requirement eternally possible; that

whatever the unknown future may hold in store for any, the present life—because of the inseparable connection of Christ with it—is, in every part and particle, sufficient unto salvation for all.

WATERTOWN, WIS.
September, 1889.

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I.

UNTO THE UTTERMOST.

"He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him."—*Heb.* vii. 25.

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."—1 *John*, i. 7.

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."—*Isa.* i. 18.

UNTO THE UTTERMOST!

I.

UNTO THE UTTERMOST.

FILTERING through the religious teaching of to-day there is a spirit of moral pessimism that gendereth to despair. The appalling doctrine gains currency, that man may glide imperceptibly downward in the path of sin to a point from which there is no possibility of return to the light and freedom of a holy life. Largely as the result of the influence of the scientific spirit of the times upon religious thought, it has come to be taken for granted that in virtue of the inevitable tendency of moral force to persist in the course upon which it has started, the evil doer may sink into a condition in which he is incapable of redemption. It is averred that even in this life the erring feet of man may pass beyond the boundary line of hope, and his probation be practically ended. Over against this gospel of doom, to which false exegesis has given an

appearance of scriptural support, it is necessary to place in boldest relief the gospel of hope, which proclaims the good news of salvation to the *lost*.

Christ is a perfect Saviour for a world of sinners. He is able to meet the heaviest spiritual demands that may be made upon him. Sufficiency of power abides in his cross to save the worst of men. His saving power reaches out to all who need deliverance from sin and condemnation, and reaches down to the depth of their utmost need. He is able to save all men, and he is able to save them entirely, completely. As far as the disease of sin has spread the saving power of his cross extends. Beyond his saving power no soul can sink. There is no case too desperate for him to undertake; there is no case ever turned away, pronounced by him incurable. For the healing of the most diseased, for the uplifting of the most degraded the power of his atonement is abundantly, yea, superabundantly, adequate. He is mighty, yea, almighty, to save. "He is able to save *unto the uttermost* all that come unto God by him."

With the talismanic word *uttermost*, which stretches beyond all human limitations of the divine mercy, the vilest sinner may repel every temptation to despair. Placing that word upon the homiletical anvil William Jay fashions out of it

the six-linked chain of gospel truth that Christ is able "to save to the uttermost ends of the earth; to the uttermost limits of time; to the uttermost period of life; to the uttermost depth of depravity; to the uttermost depth of misery; and to the uttermost measure of perfection." Christ's uttermost of redemption outreaches man's uttermost of need. With an ample ransom provided, none need go down to the pit. With sufficiency of redeeming grace encompassing every life, hell is in no case a necessity, but is always and forever a choice.

Popular preaching delights in exalting the saving power of Christ. Spurgeon, in a passing sermon, gives the following: "If you are so far gone that there seems to be not even a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a hope anywhere about you, yet if you believe in Jesus you shall live. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is worthy to be trusted. Throw yourself upon him and he will carry you in his bosom. Cast your whole weight upon his atonement, it will bear the strain." All this is true as it is forcible; but it will not do for the preacher of the gospel with one breath to say that Christ can save to the uttermost, and with the next breath to affirm that man may reach a point in perversity in wickedness which places him below the line of help and hope. Consistency there is none in affirming

that the strong arm of Christ can deliver those who have sunk the deepest in the mire of iniquity, and at the same time affirming that character can become so fixed and stereotyped that even with the power of Christ taken into account change is impossible. If the one position be maintained the other must be surrendered. The two positions are logically irreconcilable.

A father mourning over the guilt of his child is represented by Shakespeare as exclaiming:

> "Oh! she is fallen
> Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea
> Hath drops too few to wash her clean again."

With this hapless wail, which shame and wounded love have wrung from an agonized heart, contrast the tender words of mercy and hope in which the Heavenly Father addresses his sin-befouled and despairing children: "Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." That there are sins which stain a man to the inmost core of his being must be conceded; but that sin ever leaves an indelible stain, that it ever leaves a mark which the mercy of heaven cannot efface, no one who believes in the moral power of the gospel, and in the efficacy of the Redeemer's sacrifice, ought for a moment to

admit. The resources of the saving power of Christ, for the race and for the individual, cannot be exhausted. The treasury of divine grace cannot be reduced to bankruptcy. Heaven's supplies are co-extensive with man's want; heaven's remedy co-extensive with man's disease. Deeper than the deepest depths of man's guilt is God's mercy; deeper than the deepest depths of man's sin is the atoning power of the sacrifice of Christ. "So great, so high, and so extensive," exclaims the venerable John Arndt, "are the power and efficacy of the merit of the atonement that it would still prove a sufficient ransom if every man were guilty of the sins of the whole world. Nay, if there were as many worlds drowned in sin as there are men that live on this earth, yet would the merit of Christ and his righteousness be large enough to cover all their sins."*

Universal in the world, the power of Christ is also universal in the individual. Depth and breadth, intensiveness and extensiveness are equal, and equally complete. The Kingdom of Christ ruleth over all, and it ruleth over the whole man; controlling the spirit, and through the spirit controlling the soul and the body, thus bringing the entire man into subjection to the

* *True Christianity*, Book II., Chapter II.

divine will. There is no half-work with Christ. Were his atonement less than universal in the sweep of its purpose and power it would fail to meet all that is demanded, and would leave the redemption of our fallen race still unfinished; and were discovery to be made of a single instance in which the gospel had proved powerless to save we should be compelled to regard the sacrifice of Christ as incomplete, the power of Christ as something less than divine, and the purpose of God in redemption as a melancholy failure. A perfect, adequate atonement must contain of redeeming power, "enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore."

If Christ be indeed a sufficient and efficient Saviour the low condition into which any man has fallen does not place him beyond the reach of deliverance. No man, and no race of men, can fall so low, that the lever of divine power cannot lift them up to a Godlike life. Within the gospel there is a moral dynamic force which constitutes it "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." However frequently and flagrantly any man may have sinned, his case is not hopeless. The gulf of his guilt is spanned by the bridge of propitiation, and over that bridge he may pass to pardon and righteousness. In the iron wall of despair by which the sinning soul frequently finds himself

ringed around, there is always, if he only knew it, a door of deliverance. To every soul bowed down with the burden of sin, thinking himself too guilty to be forgiven, limiting by his doubt and unbelief the mercy in which he would fain believe, Christ the Blessed One says, "Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." With this declaration of universal mercy uncancelled, and unrecalled, it is a daring thing, an unwarrantable thing to say of any one in the whole round world that the sun of his hope has set, that all possibilities of good have been lost out of his life forever, and that henceforward he must continue to drift onward in the darkness of despair, uncheered by any glad forelooking to the possible dawning of a better morrow. Place a single soul beyond the hope of salvation, and a limit is put upon the mercy of God, and the saving power of Christ; in fine, the salvation of Christ is made something less than "*Salvation unto the uttermost.*"

II.

A CASTAWAY RECLAIMED.

"Thank God, no Paradise stands barred to entry."

R. Browning.

"Man cannot be God's outlaw, if he would."

J. R. Lowell.

"Wearily for me thou soughtest,
On the cross my love thou boughtest,
Lose not all for which thou wroughtest."

Judgment Hymn.

"O God! how beautiful the thought,
How merciful the blest decree,
That grace can e'er be found when sought
And naught shut out the soul from Thee."

Eliza Cook.

"My mercy doth outreach the universe;
Shall it not be sufficient for one soul?"

P. J. Bailey.

II.

A CASTAWAY RECLAIMED.

THERE are in Scripture certain things hard to be understood, which have unwittingly been wrested to the destruction of human hope. The gospel message which has been sent "to proclaim release unto the captive," has been changed into a message of doom; the door of mercy which God has opened in his Word, the hand of false interpretation with unseemly haste has shut; limits have been set up from beyond which the wanderer cannot return; the soul to which Eternal Mercy clings has been too readily surrendered to the blackness of despair; the ambassador of Christ, ceasing to publish salvation, has, without heaven's sanction, begun to ring the death-knell of souls.

An illustrative example of the manner in which the words of Scripture are frequently perverted by reading into them narrow, preconceived ideas touching the scope of redemption, is afforded in the interpretation which is commonly given to the oft-quoted words in Hosea iv. 17.

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"Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." These words have been taken as setting the seal of doom upon souls now living on this fair earth. They have been so explained as to send despair to many a heart. Take the following exposition by the gentle-hearted Matthew Henry, as a fair sample of what has been written upon this text: "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone. Let no man reprove him. Let him be given up to his own heart's lusts, and walk in his own counsels. It is a sad and sore judgment for any man to be let alone in sin; for God to say concerning a sinner; He is joined to his idols, the world, the devil and the flesh; he is incurably proud, covetous, or profane; an incurable drunkard, or adulterer; let him alone; conscience, let him alone; minister, let him alone; Providence, let him alone; let nothing awaken him till the flames of hell do it."

Such an interpretation, to say the least of it, presents a very forbidding aspect. To harmonize it with those other Scriptures which plainly teach the willingness of God to save the guiltiest sinner is a feat surpassing the highest dialectic skill. No common mind could identify as one, the God who spurns from him this offending child, saying, "Let him alone," and the God whose heart-yearnings over this very prodigal voice themselves in the tender words, "How

shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." * There is one presumptive mark of correctness which the interpretation referred to fails to reveal—harmony with the moral convictions of humanity as to what is right. That it is based upon an entire misconception of the text, we proceed to show.

The first question to be considered is, "To whom does God here speak?" A plain answer to this question not only produces a rift in the clouds, but clears away the whole cloud-bank of difficulty that has settled down upon the text. Evidently the prophet Hosea was not told to let Ephraim alone. If he received such instruction he was mindful to disregard it. Unceasingly did he beseech Ephraim to repent of his sins, and turn to God. There can be no doubt that the injunction, "Let him alone," was given to Judah. A study of the context makes this abundantly evident.

The ten tribes had hived off under Jeroboam and formed themselves into a separate kingdom. The wily usurper Jeroboam, seeing that if he was to maintain his power over the rebellious

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* Hosea xi. 8.

tribes, he must prevent them from assembling at Jerusalem as had been their wont, reasoned thus: "If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam, king of Judah." In order to strengthen his hold upon them he revived the ancient calf-worship, with which they had become familiar in Egypt. Taking counsel of his evil confederates, he made two calves of gold and said unto the people: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. And he set one in Bethel, and the other in Dan." Cut off from the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem, the people of Israel soon forgot the God of their fathers, and followed after strange gods. In the expressive language of the text they became *joined* to idols —in love with them—wedded to them.

Now Judah, although tainted with idolatry, was in the main true to God. The prophet, drawing a contrast, says: "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, even the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful among the saints." And in the text under consideration, God, through his faithful servant Hosea, exhorts the people of Judah to

let Ephraim or Israel alone, lest by keeping company with him, they become infected with idolatry. Again he says: "Though thou Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend, and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Bethaven." How needful this expostulation: The men of Judah were neighbors, and kinsmen to the men of Israel; and the Lord knew that if once they began, under cover of friendship, to attend their idol festivals they would be ensnared. Hence he, in effect, says:—"Go not upon the devil's ground; turn away your faces and your feet from these places of vanity! Ephraim is glued to idols, let him alone! Do not keep company with him or he will make you as corrupt as he is himself."

A very practical lesson, this. The only safe course for any one is to shun the society of the ungodly; "to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Nothing is more ruinous than evil companionships. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not even go across it, turn from it and pass away."

This is a very different thought, however, from the one which has been too frequently extorted from these words. When rightly understood, this text gives no countenance to the fearful

doctrine that when wickedness reaches a certain point God leaves men to themselves—gives them up to perish hopelessly in their sins; that when the need is sorest he cuts the soul adrift and abandons it to its fate; that when sin abounds grace diminishes, until it fades completely out.

There is thus no warrant furnished by the text before us for leaving the most notorious sinner alone, in the sense of ceasing to make him an object of reforming effort. This is exactly the thing which the Christian ambassador is not to do. Down to the dying moment he is to stand beside the sinner telling of the mercy that stoops to receive the fragments of a wasted life; telling of the blood of sprinkling, and challenging earth and hell to show a sin it cannot cleanse.

In the treatment of a peculiarly aggravated type of a transgressor—one who has come within the circle of Christian discipleship, and has previously wronged a member of the Christian brotherhood—the rule laid down is, "Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted." But should the wrong-doer prove unrelenting, should all efforts to win him back prove abortive, what then? "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Does that mean, "Spurn him from you; let him feel the fire of your indignation; let him be given up to walk unhindered

in the path to ruin?" No. *This* rather is the meaning:—"If by his evil conduct he has denied the faith, and you cannot longer fellowship with him as a Christian, treat him as a brother man; treat him as Christ treated heathen men and publicans; labor and pray for his repentance and restoration." Church discipline has for its ultimate aim the recovery of the fallen. Hope of realizing this aim ought never to be abandoned. When upon an infamous transgressor the severest ecclesiastical penalties must needs be visited, the end to be sought is, "to deliver such an one to Satan for the *destruction of the flesh*, that his *spirit may be saved*, in the day of the Lord."*

It is of the utmost moment to catch the spirit of divine hopefulness which irradiates the Bible; and so be led to see a possible saint in every actual devil. Untiring effort to save, can spring only from unfailing hopefulness of success. When hope dies effort will cease. Unfaith in the possibility of the reformation of the worst of men will show itself in the absence of works. The unscriptural doctrine that some men are in a hopeless state will always bear its legitimate fruit in the paralyzing of Christian endeavor. No sane man will continue his efforts to resuscitate a corpse. If the vital spark has fled, every motive

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* 1 Cor. v. 5.

for further exertion is taken away. It has sometimes happened, however, that people have been laid out for burial before they were really dead, and those who have been hastening them to interment have been surprised by unmistakable signs of returning vitality. And in like manner souls that were given up for burial in the grave of hopelessness have not unfrequently been quickened into newness of life.

Turning to Ephraim we find that he did actually repent. The castaway was reclaimed; the dead became alive; the apostate returned to the pure faith from which he had drifted away. His inner disposition and outward conduct alike were changed. He came to loathe what once he had loved, and to love what once he had loathed. With the deepest revulsion of feeling, he exclaimed, "What have I any more to do with idols!" That to which his heart had been "joined" he cast away as a thing abhorred. And God, who is rich in mercy and ready to forgive, was quick to observe the first sign of penitence. "I have heard him and observed him," he says. "When he was yet *a great way off*, his Father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

III.

GRACE CONQUERING NATURE.

"Grace works into the natural life of a man a supernatural life, which differs from the former as essentially as the world of glory differs from the present world of decay."—DR. FRANZ DELITZSCH.

"Give me a man who is choleric, abusive in his language, headstrong and unruly; and with a very few words—the words of God—he shall be rendered gentle as a lamb. Give me a greedy, avaricious, close-fisted man, and I will presently return him to you a generous creature, freely bestowing his money by handfuls. Give me a cruel, blood-thirsty wretch, instantly his ferocity shall be transformed into a truly mild and merciful disposition. . . . . In one laver—the laver of Regeneration—all his wickedness shall be washed away."—LACTANTIUS.

III.

GRACE CONQUERING NATURE.

"TOTAL depravity" in the sense of general or universal depravity is an incontrovertible doctrine; but total depravity in the sense of complete depravity in the individual is a doctrine which falsifies human history, and vilifies human nature. There *is* something good in man. Human nature produces other and better crops than weeds of wickedness. As sweet, fragile flowers are found growing upon barren deserts, among the snows of Lapland, or on the mouths of slumbering volcanoes, so in corrupt hearts are often found some of the fairest flowers of virtue. In man at his worst there remain some vestiges of goodness, some hint of the glory from which he has fallen. Were depravity total in the individual there would be nothing to save; nothing would be left to work upon for the restoration of man to spiritual health. Nevertheless, the melancholy fact remains that the strongest tendency in man is towards evil. Viewed abstractedly sin is an unnatural thing: it is a violation of the laws

of the moral nature of man. "Whoso sinneth against God *wrongeth* his own soul." Viewed practically it is natural to the depraved heart to fall into sin. The corrupt tree bringeth forth bad fruit. "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies."

There is one patent mark of natural depravity of which the Scriptures give special mention, viz., wrath, or anger. All men are said to be "by nature children of wrath."* That is to say, all men are by natural disposition and tendency prone to wrath or anger. The reference is not to wrath of which they are the objects but to wrath of which they are the subjects. "Children of wrath" are those of whom wrath or anger is predicable, just as "children of disobedience" mentioned in the previous verse, are those of whom disobedience is predicable, "disobedient children."

But, assuming for the nonce that the reference is to divine, punitive wrath, the question arises, who are the objects of divine wrath? Men as men, or men as *sinners?* Unquestionably the latter. The children of disobedience, and the children of wrath are one and the same. And is it not in perfect harmony with the natural constitution and course of things that children of

* Eph. ii. 3.

disobedience, who fulfill the desires of the flesh and the mind, should be also children of wrath? "It would," says Dr. Morison," be utterly unnatural were any but the children of disobedience to be the children of wrath; but it is natural that all the children of disobedience should be children of wrath." If the objective meaning of the term "wrath" be insisted upon, Meyer is undoubtedly right in asserting that it is only through the development of natural disposition into actual sin that men become the objects of divine wrath. The presence of inborn qualities can never of itself make man the object of divine displeasure and punishment. Man is not responsible for his natural tendencies and inclinations, but solely for his conduct in reference to them. So long as evil tendencies are resisted there can be no guilt; only when welcomed and yielded to does temptation become sin. Moral tendency may depend upon things beyond the sphere of choice, but moral character is always the result of moral action. "To suppose that a being may be morally evil before he has done evil, is to suppose that a moral character may be made for him, and not by him." Inherited tendencies to evil are misfortunes, not crimes; they demand pity, not blame. It is actual sin, and actual sin alone, that brings any one under the wrath of God.

By the great majority of commentators the question has never once been raised, whether the wrath here referred to may not, after all, be subjective rather than objective; whether, in other words, the reference is not to the wrath of man rather than to the wrath of God. It has been quietly taken for granted that these words teach the hideous dogma that man is born an object of divine wrath and condemnation; that before he has committed a single sin, he carries within him an "inborn childship of wrath." Augustine in view of this text did not hesitate to affirm that "as soon as man is conceived he is condemned." Calvin, echoing Augustine, is certain that "Paul testifies that we are born with sin, as serpents bring from the womb their poison." Dr. Charles Hodge, echoing Calvin, declares that, "the truth here taught is . . that mankind as a race are fallen, that they had their probation in Adam, and therefore are born in a state of condemnation."

One fatal objection to the above interpretation is that the term "children," in the expression "children of wrath," does not mean babes; but is employed metaphorically to denote those who are under the dominion of wrath, as children are under the dominion of a parent. Children of wrath are not those who are born under wrath, but those who by the peculiarity of their being,

are predisposed to wrath. Their inclination to wrath is not acquired, but is inherent and inherited. In a word, it is natural.

It lies entirely outside the present purpose of the Apostle to discuss the question of original sin. His object is a more practical one. He sees men in the pit of evil, lost and helpless, and his one concern is to get them out. He does not bend over them asking them how they got there. He does not stop to inquire whether they fell into the pit, or were born in it. It is enough that they are there; unable to deliver themselves. Every struggle to escape reveals the presence within them of a principle of evil which has gained the mastery over their moral natures. They are prone to evil. They are by nature children of all unrighteousness.

Anger is only one sample of the poisonous growth which springs up rank and abundant in the human heart. The name of sin is Legion. The native, inborn propensities of man incline him to every form of sin. Before he is quickened by grace he lives in the unbridled lusts of the flesh. There is within him no holy restraining power. According to the very constitution and order of things he is the child or slave of his own unhallowed desires. Perhaps in nothing is the sinful nature of man so obviously manifested as in the tendency to anger. All men are by nature

"children of anger." Even if brought up in the society of angels their natural disposition to anger would crop out. One of the first fruits which the evil tree of human nature yields is anger. Witness this in the case of the infant whose wish has been crossed or left ungratified. It is no wonder then that this sin should have been singled out as a special mark of natural depravity. It is a typical sin, a sin common to the race. It is also a destructive sin, withering like the fiery breath of the simoon every grace in the garden of the soul.

Interpreting the word "wrath" in a subjective sense, the whole phrase "children of wrath" will fall into place as part of a sharply drawn contrast between what men are by nature, and what they are by grace. By nature they are children of disobedience, by grace children of obedience; by nature children of darkness, by grace children of light; by nature children of wrath, by grace children of love; by nature children of Satan, by grace children of God. When grace conquers nature, natural disposition is changed, natural inclination and desire are reversed, unholy passion is subdued, the fierce hell-fire which raged within the breast is quenched. Among the demons exorcised when Christ enters the heart, is the demon of anger. From those who were formerly the slaves of ungoverned passions

"All bitterness and wrath, and anger are put away."

At a single stroke the foundations are thus cut away from beneath the common excuse: "I cannot help being overcome with passion; I am a child of anger; I have inherited a hot, ungovernable temper; it is as natural for me to flare up with anger when provoked, as it is for gunpowder to explode at the touch of fire." Unholy anger is natural, of that there is no denial; but is it Christian? Cannot the grace of God change nature into that which is above nature? Can it not transform the natural man into the spiritual man? Can it not alter the inward disposition, so that whereas the prevailing tendency has been towards evil it shall henceforth be towards good? Cannot the principle of righteousness which Christ imparts vanquish the inborn principle of sin, so that in spite of some remaining roots of bitterness hidden in the renewed heart the life shall be characterized by the fruits of the Spirit, which are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control?"

When Zopyrus, reading the physiognomy of Socrates, said of him, to his astonished and indignant pupils, that his face was "the rendezvous of the vices," that it was the face of a man stupid, brutal, sensual, and addicted to drunkenness, the

philosopher replied that by nature he was disposed to all these vices, and that they were only restrained and vanquished by the exercise of virtue. From whence he derived the power of virtue, by which he conquered his natural tendencies to evil, Socrates does not state. Was it from himself? Not so thought Aristotle, who says, "It is clear that not one of the moral virtues spring up in us by nature." Vice by nature, but not virtue, is the double testimony of Socrates and Aristotle. The origin of virtue was a secret which neither of them knew. Had they known it, they would have wept tears of joy. With a deeper insight into "the mystery of godliness," with a clearer knowledge of the source of all-sufficient moral help, than any heathen sage ever possessed, Paul exclaimed, "By the grace of God I am what I am: All that is good in me I ascribe to the continuous agency of divine grace operating upon me as a restraining and a sanctifying power." Thomas à Kempis is therefore standing upon Scriptural ground, when he prays: "O Lord, let that become possible to me by thy grace, which by nature seems impossible to me."

Where grace reigns nature is conquered. Those who were at enmity to God are reconciled; those who were disobedient are brought into loving, loyal submission; those who were the

slaves of sinful passions are made meek and gentle. The transformation of children of wrath who "tear their prey with sharp-edged tooth and claw," into children of love, who hold out toward their bitterest enemy hands of blessing, is the crowning victory of grace.

IV.

A PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF MAN.

"Ill habits gather by unseen degrees:
As brooks make rivers, rivers run to seas."

DRYDEN'S *Ovid.*

"For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
And master the devil, or throw him out
With wondrous potency."

SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet.*

"The habitual tendency of vice as certainly determines the choice as even a total depravity. A decided majority in Parliament carries every measure with as much certainty as if there were no minority."—A. FULLER.

IV.

A PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF MAN.

THERE was a time when the prophet Jeremiah came almost to despair of effecting any moral reform among his people. Observing their frequent backslidings; knowing that evil-doing had become a second nature with them; perceiving that through the long and complete surrender of themselves to the dominion of sinful habits they had become bound with fetters which they could not break, his hope of seeing them reclaimed, never too strong at the best, had well nigh vanished. Using words which in his day had passed into a proverb, he dispiritedly inquired: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil;" or, more literally, "*who are accustoming yourselves to do evil.*" *

This proverbial utterance of the pessimistic prophet presents rather a dark picture of the moral situation; but it must be admitted that it

* Jer. xiii. 23.

holds at the heart of it one hard, stubborn point of fact—namely, that the moral reform of habitual sinners is always extremely difficult. "Use doth breed a habit in a man," and habit strengthened by every repetition of the acts which led to its formation, becomes, after long continued exercise, solidified into character. Illustrating the force of habit, Dr. Boardman remarks: "The law of the harvest is to reap more than you sow. Sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny." Acts are the stuff out of which habits are made; habits the warp and woof out of which the web of character is woven. Good habits grow with the growth of the soul, bad habits grow with the decay of the soul. The strength of a good habit is the measure of a man's strength; the strength of a bad habit is the measure of his weakness. Increasing strength to do right is the reward of "patient continuance in well-doing;" increased weakness to resist the wrong, and to break away from it, is the penalty of habitual indulgence in evil-doing. All who accustom themselves to do evil find the practice of virtue more and more difficult. Each separate act of evil becomes an added strand in the cable of habit by which they are moored to the slimy shores of a fleshly life. How can they break the habits which have grown from cob-

webs into cables, and the strength of which is being constantly increased by every sinful act? How can they cut loose from their vile moorings, and, taking advantage of the fast ebbing tide of opportunity strike sail for a life of righteous liberty? That is the problem which has vexed the righteous soul of many a prophet! Possibility of deliverance there is none unless they can be aroused to grapple with the sin by which they have become enslaved. The practice of evil must be discontinued before the lessons of the new life are learned; the way of wickedness must be forsaken before the good way is entered; the old temple must be taken down before the new temple is built up; the old man put off before the new man is put on. To attempt the changing of ingrained habits of evil without an intermission of the acts which led to their formation would be like attempting to wash the negro white. "Cease to do evil," is the first step in the way of reform; "learn to do well," is the second: and not until the first step has been taken is the second possible. As by the double action of the lungs the bad air is exhaled before the good air is inhaled, so evil must be expelled from the heart before holiness enters. Repentance is first *from* sin, then *to* God.

Under any circumstances the habits of a lifetime are never easily displaced. They cannot be

set aside, at any moment, like a garment. It is a deduction from universal observation that those who have been born and bred in sin abide in it, that those who from childhood have been trained up to walk in the way in which they should not go, keep on to the end in that broad and well beaten path. The cases are comparatively few in which there is any sudden reform of evil habits, or any sudden breakdown of holy principle. The governing principle of life generally remains unchanged to the last. Few repent in old age, fewer still at death. The reflection of St. Augustine is full of heart-moving suggestiveness, that "there is one instance of deathbed repentance recorded in the Scriptures—the penitent thief—that none should despair, and only one, that none may presume."

But, although difficult, the reform of the habitual sinner is not impossible. The prophet did not think that his people were altogether incorrigible. He did not look upon them as having passed the convertible stage; as having got past being prayed for, or reasoned with. He seeks to rouse them to a sense of danger. He urges them to present action. This very chapter closes with the tender appeal, "Wilt thou be made clean? When shall it once be?" How long wilt thou defer repentance? How long will divine solicitude rebuke your indifference?

When will it once be, that, weary of wickedness, and moved by divine pity, you will return to God that he may heal your backslidings?

The utmost that is expressed by the strong graphic words of the proverb under consideration is the extremely difficult, and not the absolutely impossible. Similar in meaning is the hyperbolical language in which Christ represents the great difficulty of discharging the responsibilities and overcoming the temptations of riches. "It is easier," he says, "for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Of this bold proverbial phrase Lightfoot remarks that "it was used in the schools to intimate a thing very unusual and very difficult." A qualifying expression is added, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." "God's grace," says Scott, "can surmount such difficulties as are impossible for nature to overcome, and thus we are to understand the passage before us." And thus also are we to understand the words of the prophet. Words that merely assert that no man can change his own heart or habits must not be given an interpretation which leaves out of view the contrasted truth, which if not expressed is at least assumed, namely, that what man cannot do for himself the Almighty Grace of God can do for him. No man, it is true, can cleanse his own

heart and life, no man can, by his own efforts, get rid of the blackness of soul which is the result of self-developed character; but where man fails upon himself Christ succeeds. His blood cleanseth from all sin. Through the power of his cross the leprous nature of man may be renewed, the mark of the beast may be removed, the impure heart may be cleansed, the inbred habits which blackened the soul and spotted the life may be changed, the sin-seared wretch may be transformed into a heavenly child and made a fit companion for the angels.

It is told of Bunyan that when garnishing his speech with oaths an abandoned woman administered to him a severe rebuke. The child's heart that still lived in him was touched. He hung his head in shame and silence. "While I stood there," he says, "I wished with all my heart that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing. This biographer adds, "He thought himself so accustomed to this evil habit that he could not leave it off; *but he did so from that moment.*" And that he did leave it off he himself attributed to that divine grace, which, abounding to the chief of sinners, changed the skin of the Ethiop and the spots of the leopard.

A friend wrote to Coleridge urging him to give up the use of opium. "You bid me rouse

myself! Go, bid a man paralytic in both arms rub them briskly together, and that will save him. 'Alas!' he would reply, 'that I cannot move my arms is my complaint and misery.'" But what Coleridge was unable to do in his own strength he accomplished through the strength of God. Help came not from within but from without, or rather, from above. Turning from the cold comfort of an earth-born philosophy which said to one oppressed with a sense of weakness, "Be strong;" he listened to that voice of good cheer from heaven. "Be strong and of a good courage, *and I will strengthen thine heart;*" and, "Strong in the Lord and in the power of his might he brake asunder the shackles of his evil habit, as Samson his green withes."

There are two symbolic works of art, the Laocoön and St. George and the Dragon, which may be taken as setting forth in contrasted form that irrepressible conflict of man with the alien forces of the spirit-world, which underlies all mythologies and religions. In the Laocoön, that peerless work of ancient sculpture, the death-like struggles of the priest-father as he vainly endeavors to tear the coiling serpents from himself and children, presents a picture of man contending in his own might against the mightier powers of evil. The artist has caught the passion at its highest point,—as Lessing with fine

critical insight has pointed out. In the midst of a tempest of agony there is a calm like the peaceful depths beneath the wind tossed surface of the sea. But the calm which overspreads the face, suffusing with subtle power the lines of pain, is not the calm of resignation or of hope, but of mute, heroic despair. The Laocoön is a confession in marble of the failure of man at his best, to gain the mastery over evil. In St. George and the Dragon the same struggle is portrayed, but here the saint is victor. Entering the lists against the devouring, anarchic principle, of which the Dragon is the emblem, he returns from the conflict in triumph. The greatest object of human effort is attained, the highest hope of the human heart is met, the Dragon is slain, and man delivered. Deliverance is wrought out through the interposition of another. One whose heart heaven has touched with a spirit of holy chivalry wins, with his own strong arm, redemption for the weak. Fit emblem of the greater victory won by the "Strong Son of God," who came down to earth to rescue perishing souls from the Powers of darkness and sin!

V.

THE LIMITS OF EVOLUTION.

"Christianity does more than present a system of ultimate morals. It throws in a force which evolution does not reckon upon, and which hastens on all currents for good, working in human life."—C. L. BRACE.

"It is not a bad thing for a man to have a tempest in the lower half of his face, if but he has a hurricane in the upper half.—JOSEPH COOK.

"Temptations hurt not, though they have accesse,
Satan o'ercomes none but by willingnesse."

HERRICK.

"If they who wrought earth's crowning crime
Were of thy intercession worthy, Lord!
Of whom shall fellow-sinners like ourselves
Despair?"

P. J. BAILEY.

V.

THE LIMITS OF EVOLUTION.

THE one thing lacking alike in all purely materialistic schemes of evolution, and in all schemes of ethical self-culture whatsoever, is a starting-point. Who can bring life from death? is *the* question of science. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"* is *the* question of religion. The yawning gulf which stretches between a physical cause and a spiritual effect, or between a sinful cause and a holy effect cannot be bridged over by any theory of spontaneous generation. "Life proceeds from life and from nothing but life."† Purity proceeds from purity and from nothing but purity. All living souls are the offspring of the living God; all holy souls are the progeny of the Holy Spirit.

Evolution works well enough after the starting-point has been secured. Given the seed, and the evolution of the flower follows; given a right heart, and a right life follows. But with man the

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* Job xiv. 4. † Huxley.

seed is corrupt, the inner nature is defiled; and hence, looking at his case from the human standpoint, the question, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" is answered, "Not one!" No man can do it. Such a thing is contrary to the law of human generation. From an impure stock pure offspring cannot be brought forth; from a polluted fountain a clean stream cannot flow. Clean children must have clean parents. When it is said of Adam that "he begat a son in his own likeness," a particular instance is furnished of a general law. Like always begets like.

It is indisputable that man has a sinful origin, that he comes from an unclean stock, that his life is polluted at the fountain-head. In a moral sense he is badly born. The Royal Singer of Israel spoke not for himself alone, but as the mouthpiece of the race, when he exclaimed:—"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* Sorrowfully, *but not remorsefully*, he confesses the deep-seated nature of the evil from which he prays to be cleansed. Translating the strong poetic figures which he employs, into sober thought, this much of general truth remains:—Man has a sinful parentage; the world into which he is born

* Psalms li. 5.

is sinful; his body is contaminated with sin; his soul tainted with sin. Even within the sphere of experience sin is no recent thing. The consciousness of self and the consciousness of sin rise like double stars in the soul together. Man goes astray, from the womb. Not a flattering picture, but a true one! Let it be noted, however, that the declaration "in iniquity was I born," does not mean "iniquity was born in me;" nor does the declaration, "in sin did my mother conceive me" mean, "sin was conceived in me while I lay in the womb of my mother." Sin is not born into man, but done by him. The corrupt nature of man is not the cause but the occasion of sin. In the will, "the innermost core of personality," is found the *cause* of sin. Sin originates in the will of the sinner, and nowhere else. Every man is an original sinner.

But while every man is an original sinner, no man is an original saint. Sin originates in man, righteousness in God. All who enter into eternal life are "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The Chaldee paraphrase quoted by Henry, "Who can make a man clean that is polluted with sin? Cannot one, that is God?" brings out this supplemental thought. Yes, God can change the heart; he can cleanse the fountain of life so that

the outflowing streams shall be pure; he can create a new nature from which a holy character shall be produced. When therefore it is asked, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" the doctrine of divine inability must not be deduced from words which merely teach the doctrine of human inability. That man is helpless to change his own nature cannot for a moment be questioned. But who shall dare to limit the Holy One of Israel? Who shall dare to set bounds to the Infinite? Who shall dare to set up little theological stakes, saying to the onrushing tide of salvation, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further?" Limit the ocean, limit the sun, but limit not the mercy of God to erring man! There are limits to human power; but there is no limit to the saving power of God, except that which man himself sets up—his own impenitence; and when that is removed the renewing grace of God enters his heart.

For the redemption of man nothing less than the incoming of the renewing grace of God will suffice. What man needs is not reformation from without, but regeneration from within. It is not enough to pick off the bitter fruit from the tree of his life, for fresh crops will come again; the tree itself must be made good, and then will the fruit be good. It is not enough to put the transgressor behind the bars of outward restraint,

for when he is set free he will return to his evil ways; his nature must be changed and then will the desire for doing wrong be taken away. The sow that is washed is a sow still, and upon the first opportunity will return to her wallowing in the mire. Stories have been told of tigers which had been domesticated when young having all their natural ferocity aroused by the first taste of blood. The tiger-nature had not been changed; it merely slumbered, and when played upon at some careless moment it was at once excited into activity. Just so is it with man when he has changed his outward habits without changing his heart; the old corrupt nature is not dead but sleepeth, and may at any time be awakened by the touch of temptation. What is demanded is not the restraint of the old nature but its destruction, not its improvement but its dislodgment. The old nature can never be improved into the new nature. Carnal character can never grow better and better until it generates spiritual life. In the divine order all outward reformation proceeds from inward, vital change. First life, then culture; first renewal, then development; first a new heart, and then a new character; first a germinal creation, then an evolution.

When, and in what way does the germinal creation, which forms the starting-point in the upward evolutionary process of the new life, take place?

It takes place as soon as God can bring it about; and it takes place in harmony with the laws of man's nature. Upon the stream of natural law Heaven has launched the richly freighted vessel of redemption, in confidence that the onflowing tide will, in spite of every counter current, bear it forward to the destined port. Just as, in virtue of the organic unity of the race, the sin of "the first man Adam" affected the nature and character of all his descendants, influencing them mediately along the universal law of heredity, and not by some outward arbitrary act of immediate imputation; so, along the same great law the saving grace of Christ has been inwrought into human nature, that the redemption of man might be wrought out from within. As the Spiritual Head of humanity Christ has put himself into human life at the beginning, propagating and multiplying his influence through the law of heredity, which is of all the laws that mould and govern human life, the most powerful and far-reaching. From the moment that life has its genesis he is at work upon the embryonic soul, seeking through the coöperation of sanctified parenthood to obtain "a godly seed" with which to replant the world. Under him any father may become the new Adam of a better dispensation, modifying and lessening the tendencies to evil in his children; purifying the

polluted fountain of life before it breaks forth in a stream of actual transgression. From him as the secret source of spiritual life, goes forth a stream of redeeming power, which flowing parallel with the turbid tide of inherited depravity, may, whenever man himself shall so elect, be united with it, overcoming and cleansing it. However strong may be the power of inherited evil, the power of inherited grace may prove to be stronger. Not that piety itself can be inherited, but the inclination thereto may be. This delightful possibility is certainly implied in the words of Paul to Timothy: "I am filled with joy when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and, I am persuaded, in thee also." Why may not all parents give to their children a like precious heirloom? Why may not the natural and the spiritual births be contemporaneous? Why may not generation and regeneration coalesce? Why may not the spiritual atmosphere be made congenial to the growth of piety? Why may not the soul from its first unfolding be baptized with heavenly influences? Why may not the spirit of purity brood over the young life from the first moment of its existence, and work for the counteracting of its inherited depravity? Why may not divine grace prevent the ruin of

the soul, instead of coming in after the catastrophe with remedial influences? Why may not the devil be forestalled, and the soul be preempted for God? In a word, why may not the powers of good overmatch the powers of evil in the struggle for supremacy, and that blessed state of things be at length reached, in which the soul is tempted to good?

But, wherever the genetic starting-point of the new life may be located, the main thing to be kept in view is that it is always directly traceable to the presence of the life-giving Spirit in the heart. Sinful man holds within himself no power of self-recovery from the damage which his moral nature has received. "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." A fallen nature cannot produce a perfect life any more than a broken instrument can send forth melodious sounds. Restoration to spiritual health can come only through the communication of recuperative grace, by which the evil reigning within the heart is destroyed, and the good still lingering there is drawn out and perfected. Broken character can be repaired only by the inworking of a supernatural power, converting the activities which it awakens into a process of restoration. 'T is the divinity that stirs within him—'t is the living Christ that dwells within him that intimates to man the possibility of redemp-

tion. The healing fountain which man finds opened in his heart, is not from himself, but from Christ present in him.

The moral consciousness of every man testifies that far back as anything can be traced there is, working alongside the power that makes for evil, a power which he can oppose to his own destruction; a power to which he can join himself, and be lifted up out of moral degradation into god-likeness of character. Through personal participation, this regenerative power is transmuted into regenerated life. Within the open heart it operates remedially, going down to the root of the disease in the moral nature of man, bruising the head of evil; striking at the spirit and essence of sin; destroying wrong feelings; renovating unholy desire; empowering the enfeebled will; dislodging the strong man of self by the coming in of the stronger man of love; producing outward change of conduct by an inward change of nature; accomplishing, in short, a thorough, radical change in the governing thoughts of the mind, choices of the will, affections of the heart, and principles of the life. The lion is changed into the lamb, the wilderness is made to blossom as the rose, the soil of the moral nature, out of which all character springs, is altered; so that "instead of the thorn comes up the fir tree, and instead of the brier comes up the myrtle

tree." All theories of natural sequence are completely overturned. Strength is brought out of weakness, the sweet is brought out of the bitter, the clean is brought out of the unclean. Voluptuaries like Augustine are lifted up out of the mire of sensuality in which they long have wallowed, into a life of purity; rude blasphemers like John Bunyan, the Bedford tinker, have "grace poured upon their lips;" scoffing profligates like John Newton feel the hand of the Lord laid upon them, and instantly they cease to be the servants of sin and become servants of holiness, "preaching the faith of which they once made havoc;" pitiful inebriates like John B. Gough are checked in their mad career of sin and shame, by the tender pleading of the divine voice speaking within their hearts; and, turning in their weakness to the sole source of help, their fetters are broken, the demon of drunkenness is exorcised; and touched with the Lord's own pity they thenceforth spend their lives in reclaiming moral waifs who are drifting down the stream of life towards the dark gulf of hopeless ruin. Something happens in many lives by which human nature at its worst is transformed into human nature at its best; something happens by which lives of selfishness are changed into lives of benevolence, and lives of sin into lives of holiness. From among the world's outcasts sovereign grace

wins richest trophies. A host of living witnesses stand ready to render happy and triumphant testimony to the incoming of a power not of earth, a power mightier than sin, a power which proved to be to them in their low and lost estate, the moral omnipotence of God, unto salvation.

Rule regeneration out and man is bound hand and foot by the law of heredity, which is to him a law of sin and death; every sinful tendency bred in the bone comes out in the flesh; inherited evil spreads unchecked until the whole moral nature becomes incurably diseased. Rule regeneration in and the law of heredity although not destroyed is intercepted, the entail is broken, a new evolutionary process is established, a new start is given to the life of a moral being. With the impartation of a new principle of life, regeneration begins. From life and not to life is the way in which evolution works.

But whence comes life? Whence can it come save from God, the fountain of life? "The gift of God is eternal life, and this life is in his Son;" —and by him it is ministered to the world. The new heart is not an evolution but an impartation. "I will *give* you a new heart," is the word of divine promise. Shut up to the renewing grace of God as the only power unto regeneration, what can man in his helplessness do but look heavenward and pray, "Create within me a clean

heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"?

Truly wonderful is the reluctance of many to believe that man's extremity is God's opportunity, that abounding sin is met with superabounding grace, that regenerative power universal in the world and in the individual, sufficient at once to redeem all men and to redeem *the whole man*, has been put into present operation. Into the gospel of grace a legal spirit has been imported. It is thought that before the penitent is received into the kingdom of God he ought to be kept riding at quarantine; that before the prodigal is allowed to return home he ought to be stripped of his rags. "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," is changed into, "After thou hast stood in the outer darkness long enough to make amends for past transgressions, the doors of Paradise will open to receive you." Death-bed repentance is, of course, treated with incredulity. A distant hint of the bare possibility of the contrite murderer dropping from the scaffold into the arms of Infinite Mercy, calls forth a chorus of derision. It is treated as a thing incredible that a soul besotted by wickedness, whom the shock of impending death has awakened to utter an agonizing cry for mercy, should be instantly forgiven. "Heaven is for the penitent, it is urged; but heaven is not so easily won that the

repentance of a moment can wash away the sin of a lifetime: God is merciful, but he is also just, and before the sinner can be forgiven and renewed he must gather in the full harvest of his iniquity." From the standpoint of law this elder-brother reasoning is right; from the standpoint of love it is wrong. Justice demands that men reap as they have sown; the interposition of mercy makes it possible for them to reap what they have not sown. Standing in the grace of Christ, those who have sown death reap life; those who have sown hell reap heaven. The law of moral continuity is reversed; for development there is change; for evolution, revolution; for the survival of the fittest, the survival of the unfittest; for the salvation of the most hopeful, the salvation of the least hopeful. Publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of God before the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. The last are first, and the first last.

Is it said that if man were left to himself every moral movement would be downward; that all progress would be from bad to worse; and that thenceforth there would remain only the sad possibility of self-ruin, without the blessed alternative of self-redemption? Left to himself! In that sad plight no child of the Eternal Father is ever found. Into the foaming current of evil no hapless soul is thrown, to be swept on to a

resistless fate. Constant and uniform as the operations of natural law, are the operations of the Spirit of God upon every heart. Within the ruined nature of man Christ the restorer abides; and whenever his presence is welcomed, and his grace received, miracles of moral might are wrought; the taint of evil is removed; hereditary tendencies are conquered; the order of development is thereafter upward and not downward, towards righteousness and not towards sin, towards life and not towards death. Of all who unite themselves with the regenerative power operating within them, it may be said: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

VI.

MORAL MIRACLES.

"The church is the expanded gospel because it bears the life of Christ within itself."—LANGE.

"As gravitation is universal by reaching the masses through its action upon each particle, so Christianity seeks to become universal by dealing with men as individuals."—MARK HOPKINS.

"Christianity has carried civilization along with it whithersoever it has gone; and, as if to show that the latter does not depend upon physical causes, some of the countries the most civilized in the days of Augustus are now in a state of hopeless barbarism."—*Guesses at Truth*, A. W. and J. C. HARE.

"Through all depths of sin and loss
Drops the plummet of the Cross!
Never yet abyss was found
Deeper than the cross could sound."

WHITTIER.

VI.

MORAL MIRACLES.

WITH plenitude of power at her command, what a melancholy spectacle to men and angels does the Church of the risen living Christ present, standing in conscious and confessed impotence, unable to cast out the spirit of evil from afflicted humanity! A crowd of unfriendly witnesses beholding with undisguised delight her sad discomfiture ask in derision, "Where is now your divine Christ? You boast of being his agent and representative. We would see a sign from you in confirmation of your claim; let new miracles substantiated by living witnesses be produced, and we will believe that the Almighty Christ is with you, of a truth." The demand is reasonable. A divine religion ought to be able to give continuous attestation of power to perform divine works. From an institution laying claim to the indwelling of a power higher than human, nothing short of a superhuman witness will be accepted.

Pledging to his people power to perform

mighty works which should startle men from their sense-bound dreams, Jesus said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do."* What! greater works than these which their eyes beheld? Greater works than healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, and giving life to the dead? Yes: greater works than *these*. Not greater physical works certainly; not works greater in degree, but in kind. Efforts have been made to show that the miracles of the apostles were greater in degree than those of the Master. Christ healed with the hem of his garment, Peter with his shadow, Paul with his handkerchief. This, says Stier, "is a petty interpretation." The reference is evidently to spiritual works. Did Christ feed the hungry with bread? It is given to the Church to feed famishing souls with heavenly truth and love. Did Christ make the lame to walk? It is given to the Church to make moral cripples walk erect in renewed manhood. Did Christ open blind eyes? To the Church it is given to open the eyes of the understanding. Did Christ make the dumb to speak? To the Church it is given to make dumb souls sing the praises of their Redeemer. Did Christ cast out demons? To the Church has been

* John xiv. 12.

given power to cast out of the human heart, and out of human society, the demons of pride, envy, selfishness and lust. Did Christ raise the dead? To the Church has been given power to raise souls dead in sin into newness of life before God. For a partial fulfillment of the promise of Christ, look at the wonders wrought upon the day of Pentecost. Three thousand souls converted! Three thousand natures changed! Three thousand moral beings delivered from the power of sin, and led to choose, to love, and to practise a life of holiness! Was not this a greater work than any display of power in the physical realm would have been? How poor and paltry alongside these supernatural works of moral power, appeared the miracles of physical force, which often did nothing more than attract and dazzle the onlooker! Not until the Church was freed from the outward signs and wonders which were incidental to an early stage of her development; and which, while they served a temporary purpose, were in no sense to be numbered among the essentials of Christianity, did she stand forth clothed in spiritual power alone, bearing her own witness to the world; a kingdom not of earth, a kingdom that is to depend for the perpetuation of her existence and influence upon the spiritual power by which she was founded; a kingdom to which any admixture of worldly power will prove

to be like feet of clay to an image of gold;—a blot upon her beauty and a sure and certain cause of ruin.

The principle of development characterizes the plan of redemption in all its historical outworkings. Beginning in types dim and shadowy, the manifestations of truth and grace move upon a constantly ascending scale until they culminate in the God-man. So with manifestations of divine power. Beginning in the physical sphere they gradually ascend until they end in the spiritual sphere. Miracles take on a higher form; they move along a higher plane; they pass from the realm of nature into the realm of grace. Works are wrought which more strikingly display the glory of Christ than did the raising of the dead. Souls are raised from the death of sin to a life of righteousness; and the raising of dead souls is a higher work, a work demanding the exercise of a higher kind of power than the raising of dead bodies from the tomb. The miracles of Christ were themselves parables; sensible representations of moral works; visible signs of the reality and supremacy of an inner spiritual kingdom, of which the material world is but the outward shadow. The evidential value of the miracles lay in the testimony which they bore to the almightiness of Christ as the Lord of nature and the Saviour of men. By them men

were taught that Christ had power to deliver from inward evil; for no one could reasonably doubt that he who could say to the sick of the palsy, "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed and go unto thy house," had power on earth to forgive sins.

Works of supernatural power in the physical realm are no longer needed to bear witness to the working of the divine hand in the spiritual realm. The greater spiritual works speak for themselves, and bear upon their forefront indubitable evidence that they are wrought of God. Thus the argument from miracles takes on a higher form; the less being superseded by the greater. A higher order of works suggests a higher order of power, and furnishes a higher order of testimony. "Greater works" are performed as the result of a superadded enduement bestowed upon those who already possessed power to work miracles on a lower plane. Unrestricted to any special class of christians the new gift of power descends upon the universal church, breaking out on the upper side of things in marvels of moral change wrought in human hearts and lives, which afford to an unbelieving world the same convincing proof of the divine origin of Christianity, that the miracles of Christ afforded of his Messiahship.

Too often has the Church taken the lower

ground, depending less than it was her privilege to do upon the spiritual power of which she is the conservator, and which she is the chosen vessel to convey to an unregenerate world; yet, by her practical power to regenerate human character she has never failed to make good, in some measure, her claim of standing in the Pentecostal line of succession, the direct representative and agent of the Almighty Christ. Her answer to those to come to her as messengers from the world inquiring, Is the Lord among you or not? is this, "Go and tell what things ye do hear and *see;* tell of lives redeemed, tell of new miracles, miracles of grace, miracles of spiritual power wrought by the feeblest of instrumentalities, and ask if these things do not present indisputable proof of the indwelling presence of the Lord of Glory." It is a commonly expressed sentiment regarding any one far gone in sin; No human power can save him! Nothing but the grace of God can save him! Nothing short of a miracle can save him! How true this is! Culture is not omnipotent; philosophy is vain; will-power when substituted for divine power is the merest mockery. The supernatural power of divine grace, and nothing else, can save all types and classes of men, from the highest to the lowest.

Is it asked; If salvation be of the Lord, how

can man save his brother? He can save him instrumentally; he can save him as the agent of a higher power. Although possessing no power in himself he can be the hand which the divine worker uses, the channel through which the divine power is dispensed. Not apart from Christ, but in his strength and in his name are the greater works of saving power performed. Christ himself is content to remain out of sight; he hides behind his people; works in them; imparts to them his mighty power; and allows them to receive the credit for the works which he has enabled them to perform. "Christ has sown, we reap," exclaims Stier, "and the harvest is greater than the seed-time."

Were anything further needed to show that the "greater works" are spiritual works, it would only be necessary to consider the ground upon which the promise of power to perform them, is made to rest. "Greater works than these shall ye do," said Jesus, "*because I go unto my Father.*" I go unto my Father to be enthroned in the seat of power; I go unto my Father to secure for you that baptism of the Spirit which will qualify you to act in my room and stead in the spiritual kingdom which I am about to set up, and empower you to carry to completion the work of the world's redemption.

Because Christ still abides within his Church in the power of the Spirit, her power to perform spiritual miracles remains. Into her hands has been put an instrument by which she can accomplish greater wonders than those performed by the wonder-working rod of Moses. She has a gospel to proclaim which is mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin, and to the building up of the kingdom of righteousness. Wherever the gospel is preached moral transformations are accomplished which require for their explanation the operation of a supernatural power; and which draw from the most reluctant lips the acknowledgment, "What hath God wrought!"

No more thrilling romance has ever been written than the plain, unvarnished recital of the triumphs of the gospel during the last century. Things which were deemed impossible have taken place. By the introduction of a vital, practical Christianity, which makes its influence felt through medical missions, higher education, and the blessed work of woman in the jealously guarded Zenanas, the very atmosphere of social life in heathen lands has become impregnated with a subtle spirit of reform, and the most stupendous changes have gradually and silently been brought about. The walls of caste exclusiveness have begun to crack and crumble;

human sacrifices and infanticide have been suppressed; polygamy and slavery have been abolished; humaner customs and juster laws have been established. But it is among the most debased classes at home, and the most debased races abroad that the power of the living, conquering, reigning Christ has been most marvellously exhibited. Great moral changes, which those only who are spiritually blind have failed to see, have taken place. In the city slums and in the rural wastes many have been raised from the lowest depths of brutality and vice to lives of sweetness and purity. Upon the rising tide of spiritual power the lowest classes—the classes lowest in the moral scale—have been lifted up to a higher plane. Religion has become more vital; Christendom has become more Christian. Among the most degraded heathen nations a new type of civilization, distinctively Christian, has been introduced: the naked savage has been clothed; houses have been built; improved methods of agriculture have been promoted; trades have been learned; schools and churches established; the unfortunate cared for; woman elevated; marriage honored; and where before was heard the revelling of diabolical heathen orgies, the hushed and holy voice of family worship may now be heard.

Nowhere is the work of individual or social re-

generation complete. Much remains to be done. But a beginning has at least been made; light has broken; the currents of life have been altered; souls have been won back to God, brought into conformity to his will, and assimilated to his character; nations that were hastening to extinction have been arrested on the way to death and put upon the upward path of progress; that "revivifying force," which according to Frederick Harrison—the apostle of Positivism—"life and society stand in need of," has by the hand of the Church been lodged in the heart of the world, and is secretly leavening the whole social lump. As chapter is added to chapter in the history of the aggressive christian agencies of to-day, confirmation is given to the conclusion of Dr. Christlieb in his "Survey of Foreign Missions," "that no race is so spiritually dead that it cannot be quickened into new life by the "glad tidings," no language is so barbarous that the Bible cannot be translated into it; no individual so brutish that he cannot become a new creature in Christ Jesus."*

Overwhelmed by the vastness and difficulty of the work set before her, the Church, in her moments of despondency, cannot forbear from exclaiming, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

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* P. 23.

When, of old, the prophet Ezekiel was in like manner beginning to lose sight of the all-sufficient source of power, the Lord to confirm his faltering faith took him "in the spirit" into the midst of a valley which had been the scene of a great battle, and bade him look at the bleached bones of the slain. Inspecting them carefully the prophet saw that they were "very many and very dry." "Son of man, how can these dry bones live?" was the startling question put to the discouraged prophet. To human power it seemed impossible that they should ever live, but he wisely answered, "O Lord thou knowest." He did not know how it could be done, but he dared not limit the restoring power of the Holy One of Israel. When God is taken into account despair is banished. Looking at the wretched condition of the world, who has not wondered how the dry and sapless bones scattered over the plains of life could ever live again! But faith falls back upon this—God knows how it can be done. What seems impossible to man is easy to God. If God be taken into account miracles either in the physical or moral spheres can no longer be looked upon as unnatural or impossible. "Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is the Lord's arm shortened that it cannot save?" The Eternal Christ who says, "Behold I make all things new," can bring to-

gether the disjointed bones of society and of man's moral nature, and quicken them by the breath of his mouth. He can, by the touch of his life-giving Spirit "create a soul under the ribs of death." To a divine Saviour all things are possible ; and what is possible to a divine Saviour is possible to the Church in which he abides and through which he acts.

VII.

THE HIGHER ENVIRONMENT.

"Haunted for ever by the Eternal Mind."

"The All-Enfolding
The All-Upholding
Folds, and upholds he not
Thee, me, Himself?"

GOETHE.

"A sense o'er all my soul imprest
That I am weak yet not unblest,
Since in me, round me, everywhere
Eternal strength and wisdom are."

COLERIDGE.

"God enters by a private door into every individual."

EMERSON.

VII.

THE HIGHER ENVIRONMENT.

NEVER, perhaps, was more weight given than at present, to the influence of man's earthly environment upon the shaping of his life and destiny. Little room is left for the charge that too low an estimate is being made of the number and nature of these tributary influences which lead to the formation of moral habits. An ample share of credit is freely accorded to ancestry, physical constitution, climate, education, social position, companionships, home-training, and all the outward conditions and surroundings of life, for the power which they exert in the moulding of character. Indeed, the danger lies in making the earthly environment all in all, so that, given certain conditions of life, and a certain character can be infallibly predicted; given a tropical or an arctic atmosphere of moral influence, and a certain moral product is the inevitable result. The character of man is thus predestined with the certainty of absolute fate. The doctrine of unconditioned predestination

simply shifts ground. Driven from the Divine Will, it takes up its place in the outward environment which the Divine Being has thrown around his creature, man. In either case the result is the same; man is left in the iron grip of a power which he is helpless to resist—a power by which his whole life and destiny are absolutely determined.

An important factor has often been entirely lost sight of in computing the sum total of forces which go to the making up of character, namely, *the divine environment*—the environment of the human soul by the living God. This higher environment qualifies and balances the lower, and just because it is higher has proportionately more to do in giving form to character and direction to destiny. God is the element in which all men live, the pervading presence by which all life is quickened, the power diffused through all things by which all creatures are sustained in being. "As the plant upon the earth, so man rests upon the bosom of God; is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws at his need inexhaustible power." *

There is in Pantheism a great measure of truth. We have only to make the Pantheist's *Soul of the Universe* a conscious, intelligent being—a per-

* Emerson.

sonal God, in short, in order to have a true science of the world. God will not then be a dreary abstraction, he will not be put into the far distance as the Inscrutable, the Infinite, or the Eternal, but will be brought near and dwell among men, in close and abiding fellowship, as of old he dwelt among his people Israel. Witness this in the "Higher Pantheism" of Tennyson :—

"The sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the hills, and the plains,
Are not these, O Lord, the vision of him who reigns?
Speak to him then, for he hears, and spirit with Spirit can meet;
Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands or feet."

Too little account has been taken by Christian thought of the immediate communication of God with the soul. Frequently the only entrance left open to God into the city of Mansoul has been the Gateway of Knowledge. The doctrine of the direct and conscious touch of God upon the human heart has been scouted as vague and mystical. But is it so? Was not Pentecost a direct communication of power, rather than a revelation of new truth? And is not the inward feeling or conviction of a divine overshadowing presence one of the most clearly recorded facts of consciousness? Is it not the great primary fact in human nature which forms the real basis of our knowledge of God? Just as we receive the first knowledge of the outward world by

sensation, so we receive the first knowledge of God from a sense of his brooding presence, a sense at first dim, but gradually growing clearer with the expanding of moral consciousness, until to the feeling of nearness there is joined the knowledge of sacred relationship; and with all the spontaneity of natural love, and with all the certainty of knowledge, come the words, "Abba, Father."* This upspringing of filial love by which "the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God," must not be watered down to a subjective inference. It is a direct and conclusive evidence of our filial relation to God. And thus is the saying of Richter verified: "We arrive at the knowledge of the Infinite by wings, not by steps." We feel God near before we hear his voice. We feel the touch of his hand, the drawing of his love, the effluence of his power, before we have learned to syllable his name.

A beautiful illustration of the inward witness of the heart to the presence of God is afforded in the case of a soldier who was severely wounded in one of the battles of the war of the Rebellion. As he lay at death's door, his mother hastened from her Northern home, and arriving at the hospital desired to be taken to him at once. She

* Freely translated by Luther, "dear Father."

was informed that he was sleeping, and that it would not be best to disturb him. She was allowed however to go to his couch and take the place of the nurse who sat by his side with her hand upon his feverish brow. But hardly had the mother's hand touched his forehead when the patient's eyes opened, and he started up in great excitement. "Whose hand was that?" he asked. "That felt like my mother's hand; bring a light and let me see my mother's face!"* When the hand of God touches us shall we, even in the darkness of our ignorance and sin not know it? Will there be nothing in the nature of that touch to bring the conviction that the unseen friend who is bending over us, is our loving, Heavenly Father?

This immediacy of contact, this impact of the divine upon the human, this outflowing of the divine into the human, is made possible because of oneness of relationship and nature. When the divine within man calls to the divine without him, what is it but the child calling to the Father? And when the divine without him calls to the divine within him what is it but the Father calling to the child?

Between man and his divine environment there is the same wondrous correlation, the same wise

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* The *Homiletical Review*, Vol. IX. p. 90.

adjustment, that there is between man and his earthly environment. The eye and light, the ear and sound are not more manifestly correlated to each other than are man and God. Man has evidently been made for God—made, in other words, for his spiritual environment. All the roots of his existence are in God. A sense of utter and absolute dependence upon a higher power is the deepest feeling of his nature. In this feeling of dependence is found the vital norm of faith, the common source of religious life. Even Herbert Spencer, the prophet of the Unknowable, finds himself compelled at last to fall back upon the belief in "the omnipresence of something which passes comprehension." * The omnipresent "something" which passes comprehension is the omnipresent God, the great underlying support of all things. The inborn feeling of dependence, from which it is impossible for man to free himself, implies the existence of something objective upon which man can stay himself, something upon which in his conscious weakness he can securely lean. The principle of dualism which gives to every appetite appropriate objects of gratification; to every mental faculty appropriate external objects upon which to exercise itself, gives to the religious feeling its appropriate

* *First Principles*, p. 45.

object of satisfaction and support. Objective supply is correlated to subjective want, as food to hunger, or as water to thirst. In his deepest need man is not mocked. As the complement of his creature insufficiency he finds divine all-sufficiency; as the complement of his weakness he finds almighty strength, as the complement of his darkness he finds everlasting light; and as the complement of his hunger of heart he finds eternal love.

> "God's greatness flows around his incompleteness,
> And round his restlessness *His* rest." *

Belief in a divine environing presence brings with it a sense of infinite and present helpfulness. If the earthly environment of man is at times more of a hindrance than a help in the attainment of moral ends, his heavenly environment, which encloses the earthly environment as a large circle encloses a smaller one, counteracts every evil, earth-born tendency; so that instead of being the creature of circumstances, he may by the help of heaven make the most stubbornly opposing circumstances "ministers of his to do his pleasure." "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," the poet has said. He might with equal truth, have said, Heaven lies about us always. "The Lord is never far from every one

* Mrs. Browning.

of us." Although he sometimes "hideth himself on the right hand that we cannot see him," he is in reality near. A realizing sense of his nearness may not be always enjoyed, but the soul that has learned to walk by faith when feeling fails, falling back upon the absolute truth of his abiding presence, can pass through the darkness and danger of the valley of deathshade, exultantly exclaiming, "I will fear no evil, *for thou art with me*."

"Life," says Browning, "is just our chance of the prize of finding love." In a higher sense it is the chance of the prize of finding God. And whoever finds God finds love also; for "God is love." Destitute of the power of self-subsistence the heart of man is nourished by a constant efflux from the great primal source of love—the heart of the Infinite. Driven out of himself in search of an objective source of succor, by the painful consciousness that in himself he has no resources, man finds no rest, until his inner ear catches in "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees," the movements of a higher power that is hastening to his assistance. Then his fears are instantly quelled, his strength is revived, and with undaunted heart he stands ready to meet the conflicts of life, sustained by the hope that the mighty power by which he is girded and guided will not fail him in the greatest emergencies.

Living with God and in God, is the secret of life. There is hope for man only as he keeps in connection with God. Cut off from God, the spiritual nature of man withers and dies. "As the branch cannot bring forth fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me," says Christ, the manifested God. Again he says, "Apart from me ye can do nothing." Alas, for him who will not go out of himself to Christ for power to overcome the evils of his earthly environment, but withdraws within himself, refusing in his pride and self-sufficiency to avail himself of the inspiring, purifying, and ennobling influences which have been thrown around him, and made available for his redemption. But happy the man who can say with Jacob Boehme; "The element of the bird is the air; the element of the fish is the water, the element of the salamander is the fire, and the heart of God is my element." Man was made for God as the ship is made for the sea, and when he is separated from God—like a stranded ship lying high and dry upon the beach, rotting in the sun—he is out of his native element. Abiding in God he not only lives, but *moves;* he makes progress in the highest things, being borne on by the power of God to the glorious destiny for which he was created.

Eternal life being therefore possible only by

vital union between man and his divine environment, let good heed be given to the injunction: "Keep yourselves in the love of God—" which means, Keep yourselves in your proper environment. Live in the divine love as an atmosphere; bathe in it as an ocean; root yourselves in it as the soil of your being; stand under its rays and let it soak into your spiritual nature, until every fibre thrills with the fullness of holy energy!

VIII.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF REDEMPTION.

"God wisheth none should wreck on a strange shelf.
To Him man's dearer than to himself."

BEN JONSON.

"Heaven penetrates to the depths of all hearts as daybreak illumines the darkest room."—CONFUCIUS.

"God's creatures each through some little narrow slit, and in the measure of their capacity, get a straggling beam from him into their being."—A. MCLAREN.

VIII.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF REDEMPTION.

In the unity of God the universality of the eternal purpose of grace is necessarily involved. There is one God who holds to all men the same relation, therefore there is one purpose of grace which bears alike upon all. Each one of his earth-born children is to the All-Father equally dear; for each he has a place in his infinite heart; to each he has given, in Christ, sufficiency of grace to enable him to meet every moral demand. This is the argument of Paul when he says;—"God willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth; for there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all." * One God, one Christ, and therefore one purpose regarding all men, and that one purpose that all should be saved. From the doctrine of the divine unity

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* 1 Tim. ii. 4, 5.

light flashes forth upon some of the darkest portions of man's moral pathway, and enables him to walk with certain steps where before his feet had stumbled. However unequally spiritual favors may seem to be distributed, however unequal the number of talents, or the measure of opportunity and light given to each, through every life there runs the golden thread of a gracious purpose. In all the arrangements of life the accomplishment of that purpose is made the primal object. God seeks first, for every man, his kingdom and righteousness, and other things are added or subtracted as the furtherance of the spirit-life may demand.

Man is not a friendless orphan in a forlorn world. Life is not a game of chance in which one happens to draw a prize, and another a blank; much less is it a game of the gods in which the iron hand of Fate, with men for pawns, unerringly works out the end decreed of heaven. Because embraced in the purpose of eternal love, endless possibilities lie enclosed in every life, the development of which no alien power can forever prevent. With infinite goodness behind it, the possibility of limitless progress within it, life at its worst is worth having—worth living. In itself of God's gifts the goodliest, of Heaven's boons the best, its value is enhanced by what it

may be made when redeemed and beautified by the grace of Christ.

By the one mediator, Jesus Christ, the universal purpose of the one God in the creation of man is brought to fulfillment. Hidden from created sight, dwelling not in darkness impenetrable, but in light that is inaccessible, God manifests himself mediately, through Christ; carries out his purposes through Christ. When he would create or save a world, it is done through Christ. Whatever dealings he has with man, or man with him, are carried on through Christ. Standing in union with God and man, Christ the God-man forms the golden link that binds them together. Nor does his mediatorship express a temporary but an eternal relation. It was not something begun with his incarnation. His incarnation was merely the self-revelation of his abiding presence as the Mediating Word through whom God had been continually manifesting himself to humanity, through whom he had continually been acting upon humanity, and through whom he had unweariedly been seeking to bring humanity into abiding union with himself.

The mediation of Jesus Christ culminates in redemption, that through redemption the end of creation might be realized. The one mediator "is the man Christ Jesus, *who gave himself a ransom for all.*" Because of his essential oneness with

the race to which he joined himself, his life interblends with every other life. From him as the Head of humanity blessing descends to every member. A representative man, he is also the representative of man. He acts in and through the race ; he acts also for the race. What he does in humanity he does for humanity. When he dies a world dies ; when he rises from the dead, a world is made alive. In becoming man he comes under the law in order that he might break its destroying power, and redeem those who were under its curse. Holding his erring brethren in the close embrace of his love, he goes down with them into the depths of death, coming under the utmost malediction of their offense that he might ransom them from the power of iniquity, and bring them up, by the way of repentance, into a life of fellowship with Heaven, upon which can rest no shadow of condemnation. Through the power of suffering, sacrificing love as revealed in his cross, the power of evil which had gotten hold of man is checked, the poison of sin is neutralized, spiritual death is arrested, conscious union with God is effected, and man is saved.

That no man can enjoy an adequate probation apart from Christ is a foregone conclusion. Only by denying the present universality of the operations of Christ's redemption can it be made to appear reasonable and right that probation

should, in any case be continued under more favorable conditions beyond the grave. But the real point at issue is whether all men are not now enjoying an adequate probation under a system of grace; whether this present life, because of the place which Christ occupies in it, as the light and the life of men, does not, even in its lowest stages of development, afford to every man an adequate moral education, and therefore an adequate moral test; and whether to any one it ever ceases to be a condition of moral training—passing from trial to doom, from grace to fate, so that now and here there may be a great gulf fixed which no bridge of hope can span. With Christ in it, life is full of glorious possibilities to all; with Christ left out of it, life would be shorn of everything that could make it a sufficient probation to any. It is the connection of Christ with life that alone renders it spiritually decisive. It is the present gracious relation of Christ to men that forms the ground of his future judicial authority over them. He meets every man as Saviour before meeting him as Judge.

Nothing could be further from the teaching of Scripture than the assumption that "punishment can be justly inflicted on sinners outside of a Christocentric system of probation."* What kind

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* *My Study.* A. Phelps, p. 81.

of a probation save that which is *Christocentric* can be sufficient unto the needs of fallen man? There are not two systems of moral trial; one which has Christ for its center, and one in which Christ has neither part nor lot. To all men Christ sustains the same relations; to all men the saving influences of his atonement extends. He is the light which lighteth every man coming into the world. The light of nature, the light of reason and of conscience, the light of revelation—are all from him. Coming from the same source they fulfil in different measures the same blessed end. Redeemed by the one atoning sacrifice all men are under one and the same system of grace, and their degrees of responsibility and guilt correspond with their degrees of privilege and knowledge. In the sublime fact that in every life abounding sin is met and matched with superabounding grace is found the only true theodicy.

Happily it has come to pass that in the universality of the purpose of God as expressed in the person and work of Christ, the solution of the great and grave problem of life and destiny is being hopefully sought. There is a growing conviction that here if anywhere light is to be found. At the same time there is, even on the part of those who have found out the true starting-point, a strange reluctance to accept

all that is involved in the universal relation of Christ to man, as brother, friend and Saviour. With many, the chief point of difficulty—the point at which the universality of the divine purpose of redemption seems to fall short—the point at which the universality of the atonement seems to evaporate—is not the obvious limitation of the saving benefits, but the still more obvious limitation of the saving knowledge of the atonement. It is asked:—What good has the atonement of Christ done for those who lived before his coming? What benefit does it confer upon those who occupy the vast outlying circles beyond the sphere of Scripture illumination? "Can it be considered as universal *if* a large portion of the race know nothing of the historical Christ and the redemption that is in him?"* These questions assume that the knowledge of Christ as historically revealed is necessary to salvation; or in other words, that only one form of knowledge is saving. An unwarrantable assumption! Nowhere do the Scriptures restrict salvation to those who are fortunate enough to possess the biography of Jesus the Christ; nowhere do they confine the saving power of Christ within certain geographical limits, or within certain boundaries of time; nowhere do they drive us by their teach-

* *Progressive Orthodoxy*, p. 63.

ings, in spite of the protests of the heart, to the inexorable conclusion that the vast majority of the race from no fault of their own have been lost; and nowhere do they make the least acknowledgment of failure on the part of the present system of grace to reach every man with redeeming power, or acknowledge any necessity for indemnifying the failure of the present by lengthening probation into the future. The aim of the Bible is not to tell to men the seven-sealed secrets of the future, but to make known to them the glorious possibilities of the present. It is with "the life that now is" that the revelation of God in his Word is mainly concerned. Knowledge of the future is largely inferential, knowledge of the present is positive and real. Whatever the future may bring,—and that we can well afford to leave with the all-loving One —the present is a day of grace, a day filled to the brim with redeeming influences, a day in which the attainment of a redeemed manhood is possible in every life.

It is no wonder, when the present plan of God to save men is made out to be an egregious failure, that short and summary methods are suggested by which the deficiencies and failure of the present may be supplemented in the world to come. But, is the present plan a failure? Has Christ died for any man in vain so far as being

able to save him in this life? Is redeeming love ever fettered so that it cannot move when struggling souls cry aloud for help? Has life, in multitudes of instances to run to its fateful end in an unhindered course of evil, with an impotent Christ looking on? Is this world to which the Son of God descended—this world upon which, and for which he shed his precious blood, the theatre of Redemption's unfinished and unsuccessful plot? Is it the Thermopylæ of the universe at which the Heavenly powers of light and love have fought their best, but have fallen defeated, although crowned with glory and honor? No! here has been the scene of Heaven's grandest triumph! Here hell has been vanquished! Here the Cross has been lifted up, the symbol not of defeat, but of victory!

True, Heaven's purpose of redemption is not yet completed; but its final realization is fully assured. By the widening knowledge of the gospel it is being progressively unfolded, increasingly realized. At no point, however, does it fail to reach its destined end. The help that man needs is not postponed into the future, but is ministered to him as he needs it. Christ is always a present Saviour; to-day is always the day of salvation; the present is always spiritually decisive.

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IX.

THE FORTHPUTTING OF REDEMPTIVE EFFORT A NECESSITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

"O Lord, if thou wert needy as I,
If thou shouldst come to my door as I to thine,
If thou hungered so much as I
For that which belongs to the spirit,
For that which is fine and good,—
I would give it to thee if I had the power."

From an outline sketch by SIDNEY LANIER.

"Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde;
Hae mercy on my soul, Lord God,
As I wad do, were I Lord God,
And ye were Martin Elginbrodde."

An epitaph by GEO. MACDONALD.

"Though man sits still and takes his ease,
God is at work on man,
No means, no moment unemployed
To bless him if he can."

DR. YOUNG.

IX.

THE FORTHPUTTING OF REDEMPTIVE EFFORT A NECESSITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

It is a cold view of life that represents it as a probation, with God standing over man commanding him to walk on the sharp edge of moral obligation, looking on to see if he keeps his balance, rewarding him if he succeeds, and punishing him if he falls or falters. Probation is merely an incident of life, and not its distinguishing feature. Life is a preliminary term of moral education and discipline. The primary object for which man is put into the school of life is not that he might be tested, but that he might be trained. God himself directs the moral education of all his children, and watches its result with the deepest parental solicitude. When he sees any one endeavoring to walk in the steep and slippery path of righteousness in spite of numerous stumblings, his gentle voice whispers encouragement, and his tender hand is outstretched to uphold and guide the wavering, tottering feet. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over

her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord doth lead us." * With the repeated experiments and failures of his children the Heavenly Father is very patient. When faint and ready to perish they are upborne on the broad wings of his love and power. Their necessity is their plea for help, and the direr their necessity, the stronger their plea. "Pardon mine iniquity, *for it is great*," is with God an all prevailing argument. The very helplessness of man is to God sufficient reason why he should stand by him, and render him all possible assistance.

As a sinner, man is "without strength." He cannot stand upright, and walk in the way of the divine commandments. And when out of his distress he looks up into the divine face, and says, half in doubt and half in faith, "If thou canst do anything for me, have compassion on me and help me," can we think that God would be doing the right thing by him to leave him unaided? The claim that misery has upon sympathy, the claim that weakness has upon strength, demands that a helping hand be reached down from heaven to every feeble mortal, in his oft-renewed struggles to be freed from sin, and to live a pure and righteous life.

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* Deut. xxxii. 11, 12.

From his very nature, God must pity man in his disabled condition, and make every possible effort for his redemption. Necessity is laid upon him to stir up his strength on man's behalf,—not the necessity of fate, but the necessity which a heart of infinite love is under to seek relief in the impartation of benefits; the necessity of a holy nature to find delight in doing good,—the same necessity which a true mother feels, when, impelled by love she rushes into a burning house, and risks her life in order to save the lives of her children. We pay God a poor compliment, when pushing to an unwarrantable extreme the doctrine of his absolute sovereignty, we claim for him the right to do wrong, by claiming for him the right to pass by some of his hapless children, and to select others as objects of special favor, and of effectual help. Does partiality cease to be sinful only by being attributed to the Heavenly Father?

Against the doctrine of partial love the heart lifts up its protest, and as sentiment ultimately gets the better of logic, a doctrine against which the heart protests has upon it the seal of doom. No theory of bare sovereignty can command for ever the homage of men. The spirit of man will bow before the scepter of sovereign power only when it is seen that the Almighty and the All-Good are one. God is loved because he is seen

to be lovesome; he is obeyed because his commands are known to be just and right.

For everything that God does we may be sure that he has a good and sufficient reason to give, although that reason may be often hid from us. "Our God is in the heavens and he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased;" but it is not possible that he should ever be pleased to do wrong. In all his actions infinite love is directed by infinite reason. In his infinite reason he finds the eternal law of righteousness, which were he to violate, he would cease to be God.

The meanest creature that breathes has rights which God as the great Head of the universe is bound to respect. Man in virtue of special relationship to God has special claims upon him. If Creatorship has its responsibilities, much more has Fatherhood. As the universal Father of men God is bound to seek as the ultimate end of the order of things which he has established in the world, the highest welfare of his entire human family. As the Father of disobedient and rebellious children, he must from his very nature do all that is reasonable and right to reconcile them to himself, and thus to restore harmony among themselves. One would think that this ought to be accepted as self-obvious. And yet, in the present year of grace a modern theologian, "as one born out of due time," is found contending

that God owes nothing to his children; and declaring that "the assertion that God is bound either in this life or in the next, to tender pardon of sin to every man has not only no support in Scripture, but is contrary to reason."* What! is the obligation of any moral being to be merciful contrary to Scripture and to reason? Is it only the earthly father who finds in the imperative demands of his parental nature a law which binds him to keep open door for the penitent prodigal? Does not the charge of partiality implied in these words put a stain upon the divine perfections, by making the thoughts and ways of God seem lower instead of higher than the thoughts and ways of man? In view of the fact that "the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind," it is perhaps only natural that man should generally err by narrowing that which seems to him too great. Man is himself so small that his largest thought may be a belittling of the Infinite. Of one thing, however, we may feel confident: whenever God is made to appear arbitrary and partial his character is travestied; whenever his ways are represented as unequal, they are misrepresented. Infinitely great and good, the Heavenly Father has but to be known to be revered and loved. His purpose

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* *Dogmatic Theology*, Dr. Shedd, Vol. I. p. 426.

of grace concerning humanity, evolved in history, revealed in Scripture, and brought to completion in Christ has but to be understood, to fill and thrill the heart with adoring joy, and to satisfy every man that he is not being dealt with unfairly; but that whatever be the outward conditions of his life, the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus has been placed within his reach.

Shut the door of moral opportunity and possibility, and moral responsibility is gone. Can man be held responsible for repentance if he is not called to repentance? Can he be held responsible for remaining unforgiven if no tender of pardon has been made to him? Can he be held responsible for a righteous life if grace sufficient for the mastery of evil and for the attainment of righteousness be withheld? For God to demand repentance without the offer of pardon; for him to demand a righteous life without supplying the conditions necessary to its production would be to out-Pharaoh Pharaoh. It would be like demanding bricks not only without straw, but without clay.

Look at men in the mass! Brought into existence without their own consent; planted in the midst of untoward conditions which they would never have chosen; surrounded with seductive temptations; cursed with inherited evil tenden-

cies; entangled in a network of unfavorable circumstances, the pursuit of moral goodness must always be made under great difficulties. Every attempt to walk in the path of righteousness is like "toiling in immeasurable sand"; and unless there intervene a power sufficient for their deliverance, deeper and deeper their feet must sink until they become entombed where they had hoped to find a path of safety. With no divine hand upon the helm, the fairest work of God must drift to helpless wreck upon the ragged rocks of sin.

But not if God can prevent it will such a catastrophe ever happen. Man has cost too much already, his intrinsic worth is too great for his Maker to allow him to perish without exhausting every expedient to save him. Nothing that can righteously be done to save him from ruin and to secure his highest weal, has been left undone. Every human right has been respected; every divine responsibility has been met. God is "a righteous Father," "a faithful Creator." He deals justly by every man; yea more, he deals generously—mercifully. He is "a just God, *and a Saviour*." *

In the matter of salvation, God has satisfied his own sense of justice. He has been true to

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* Isaiah xlv. 21.

himself. His treatment of man is regarded with supreme self-approval because in everything the law of love has been fulfilled. The sacrifice of Christ was not a satisfaction *to* divine justice; it was not the reconciliation of warring attributes in the Godhead; but the reconciliation of rebel man to God. Among the divine attributes there was no schism. No personal anger existed on the part of God towards man. Nor did he cause vengeance to fall upon an innocent head, that he might be pacified towards those upon whose heads the stroke ought to have fallen. The atonement originated in God, and was the outward expression of an eternal element in his nature. It was the proof, not the purchase, of his love—a revelation to the universe of his inmost heart. Questions of government were involved in man's redemption. God himself required atonement. As the merciful Father of men he stood ready to forgive personal offense; but the honor of the law, and the imperilled interests of others demanded that the brand of his abhorrence be put upon sin, so that he might be acknowledged to be just in forgiving the ungodly. With his beloved Son God was well pleased, because by the sacrifice of himself which he so freely rendered, he paid to the uttermost farthing the debt of divine justice. The sacrifice of Christ instead of being a satis-

faction *to* divine justice was a satisfaction *of* divine justice. But it was more,—infinitely more than that. It goes far beyond all considerations of bare justice; exhibiting as nothing else can do the length, and breadth, and height, and depth of sovereign mercy. To the mercy which it reveals sinful man can lay no just claim, for mercy always implies the absence of merit. From beginning to end salvation is of grace. Even-handed justice did not demand that God should go as far as he has done. It was enough that man have a free field and no favor, that he be placed upon a footing of law, with all hinderances removed, but with no balance in his favor. God has done all that could reasonably have been expected of him; yea, he has done "exceeding abundantly" above all that man in the urgency of his need, or in the boldness of his thought could ask or think. The superabundance of the provisions of divine grace for the salvation of man, is the surprise of the universe. Such wealth of favor as has been shown to man cannot be claimed as a debt, but ought to be received as a gift most precious. Calvary's sacrifice reveals not man's deservings, but the necessity of the divine nature to overflow in great and gracious deeds. Love like God's could find fitting expression in nothing less than in the giving up of its dearest treasure. And so the

poor Indian woman touched the deepest philosophy of redemption when she said of God's love-gift to the world—"It was just like him."

The sacrifice of Christ is also designed to satisfy the sense of justice in all created intelligence. It is God's answer to man's demurrings when mercy is shown to the erring. It is God's vindication of himself in giving the penny to the eleventh hour laborer. In the atonement of Christ the Father goes out and reasons with the elder son, who, smarting under a sense of injustice, refuses to enter into the Father's joy over the home-coming of the prodigal. That the elder son fails to acquiesce in God's treatment of the sinful; that he fails to be reasoned out of the narrow idea that mercy is incompatible with justice, is no proof that the divine argument is not satisfactory, but is proof rather of the slowness of man to take in the highest lesson of divine wisdom, and so to rest satisfied with that which satisfies God.

With a love that stoops to conquer, God makes his appeal to the bar of human reason. He asks man to consider whether in all his dealings towards him, he has not conformed to the highest principles of right. "Are not my ways equal? saith the Lord." He goes still farther. Appealing to the deepest instincts of parental affection he asks, "What more could I have done?"

what farther effort could I have put forth? what greater sacrifice could I have made? There are times when every man is made to feel and acknowledge, "God has done the fair thing, the best thing by me; in all his dealings with me he has been guided by the golden law of love; if I am lost the fault will be mine, and not his." Our guarantee that the Judge of all the earth will do right by every one at last, is that he is doing right by every one now.

Moral probation is thus related not to law, but to grace. The sinful condition of any man does not render his salvation impossible. Theorize as we may about the nature of the atonement, the fact of the atonement remains. The question of sin has been settled, so that the number or the enormity of sins forms no obstacle in the way of salvation. The whole race has been placed upon a new footing—a footing of mercy. Men are condemned not because they are sinners, but because they are unrepentant, unbelieving, disobedient sinners. Souls perish in the darkness and bondage of sin, not because the prison doors are closed upon them, but because they refuse to pass through the open door into the sunlight and liberty, to which all men are called in Christ Jesus.

X.

THE SIN THAT SHUTS THE DOOR OF MERCY.

"Bad are those men who speak evil of the good."

—H. T. Riley.

"Whoever sins against light kisses the lips of a blazing cannon.

—Jeremy Taylor.

"Try what repentance can; what can it not?
Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limèd soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engaged!"

Shakespeare.

"But once Immanuel's orphan cry the universe hath shaken;
It went up single, echoless, 'My God, I am forsaken!'
It went up from the Holy's lips, amid his lost creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use these words of desolation."

Mrs. Browning.

X.

THE SIN THAT SHUTS THE DOOR OF MERCY.

If there exists a universal purpose of grace, it is plain that there exist also obstructions to its development and complete fulfillment. On what side are these obstructions to be found? On the divine side, or on the human side? Assuredly on the latter. The Holy One of Israel is limited by human unbelief, and by the refusal of man to co-operate with his gracious operations. Were the accomplishment of the divine purpose solely a question of almighty power, its solution would be simple and easy. Moral transformation cannot, however, be effected by the touch of God's creative finger. God does not deal with moral beings as he deals with inert matter. Moral personality is in his sight a sacred thing, and it never suffers violence at his hands. All things are governed according to their nature; moral beings by moral laws, and physical objects by physical laws. When, therefore, scientific terminology is taken to describe spiritual things, correspondence must not be mistaken for identity; meta-

phor must not be exalted into argument; parable must not be translated into literal matter of fact detail. Points of comparison there undoubtedly are between things spiritual and things material, but they belong to different kingdoms, and are under the operation of different laws. Moral beings are not under the law of necessity which holds sway over the world of matter. They can surrender to or resist the working of divine power. Any change wrought in them is not a mechanical thing, accomplished by a power "from without which seizes upon them and regenerates them." Moral change is always conscious and voluntary; conscious because man is an *intelligent* being, voluntary because he is a *moral* being. While then it is true that in the natural world "the door from the inorganic to the organic is shut and no mineral can open it," it is not true that "the door from the natural to the spiritual is shut and no *man* can open it."* In the tender appeal: "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man will hear my voice *and open the door* I will come in," salvation is made to hang upon the fateful "IF" of human choice. The entire freedom of the mind in the act of faith is often strangely ignored. Power to accept God's testimony implies power to reject it; power to obey God

* *Natural Law in the Spiritual World.* Drummond, p. 71.

implies power to disobey him; power to fulfil his will implies power to thwart it. The reason why God fails in any case to accomplish his purpose of grace is not found in the insufficiency of power at his command, but in the unplastic character of the material with which he has to work. Opposition to God is the essence of all sin; persistent opposition to God is the culmination of sin; it is *the* sin, the *only* sin, which shuts upon sinful man the door of mercy.

There are three distinct aspects in which this death-dealing sin is set forth in the Scriptures. These we shall now proceed to take up in order; endeavoring, if possible, to cut a pathway through the tangled thicket of human speculation, in order to catch a glimpse of the sunlight of divine truth.

THE UNPARDONED SIN.

"Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto man; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him; neither in this world, nor in that which is to come."—Matt. xii. 31, 32. Compare Mark iii. 28. 29, Luke xii. 10.

In Luke's gospel, the sin against the Son of Man is sharply distinguished from the sin against the Holy Ghost. "Every one who shall speak

a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him, but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven." What is the point of difference between the sin of speaking against the Son of Man, and the sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit? Why is it a worse offense in the sight of Heaven to sin against the vicar or substitute of Christ, than to sin against Christ himself? What is there in the particular sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit that renders it peculiarly aggravating, and unavoidably fatal? The ground of distinction and difference is substantially this: the sin against the Son of Man is a sin against Christ historically revealed, committed in the darkness of ignorance; the sin against the Holy Ghost is a sin against Christ as immanent in the soul, committed in the daylight of knowledge. As a sin of ignorance the sin against the Son of Man shall be forgiven. The Lord will not lay it to the charge of any soul. The mind uninstructed in the things of the Kingdom of God may be so beclouded by ignorance, the mind falsely instructed may be so darkened by prejudice that when "the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" makes his approach, he may not be recognized. Christ enters into the soul which he has made, but he is neither known nor welcomed. He comes unto his own

and his own receive him not. But he is patient and pitiful. He knows that there are many princely souls, who if they only knew him as the Lord of glory would cease to crucify him. Their sin of ignorance not being willful he mercifully overlooks. Some of the Jews opposed Jesus, doubtless because they understood him, but many of them opposed him because they misunderstood him. While firmly trusting in "the Hope of Israel," revealed in the Old Testament, and eagerly looking for his coming, they in their blindness rejected the actual Christ, the Messiah of God. The Apostle Peter when charging the Jews with denying "the Holy One and the Just," softens his accusation by saying, "I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." And Jesus upon the cross prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Had they known the full meaning of their evil deed many of them would have acted differently. Knowledge is the measure of guilt. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." "If ye were blind ye would have no sin, but now ye say 'we see,' your sin remaineth." Sins of ignorance are sins because violations of law, but they are not treasured up against the soul who diligently follows the light he has. When they become known they bring a sense of guilt, and call for

pardon; therefore even under the law provision was made for sins committed in error.*

From its very nature, the sin against the Holy Ghost, as a sin against the immanent Christ, personally and privately revealed, cannot be a sin of ignorance, but must always be a sin of presumption; hence it implies a state of heart which precludes the possibility of forgiveness. Not to welcome and accept the testimony of the Holy Spirit, as far as it is known, is to put one's self in an unpardonable condition. The Spirit comes to every man bringing the light of life. He comes to dispel the ignorance in man regarding God; he comes to overcome the opposition of the human heart to the divine; he comes to testify of Christ as revealed in the word, and as immanent in the heart. To sin against the Holy Spirit by quenching his saving light, is to leave the soul in hopeless darkness; it is to shut out the soul from the only source of saving light which Christ has given to men; and thus to reach a state of willful ignorance and unbelief which God cannot overlook. "Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the Lord doth not accept them."† "A man may be guilty of many offenses against the Son of Man, without the rupture of his cove-

* See Lev. iv. 13, 14.

† Jer. xiv. 10.

nant relation; but when his sin runs up into blasphemy against the inward light of the Holy Spirit, he breaks out of the circle of forgiveness and stands upon the sinner's ground, unforgiven, yea, condemned in the sight of heaven." *

Augustine held that the "unpardonable sin," is *persisted-in unbelief*, or final impenitence. With this agrees the whole tenor of Scripture. "He that believeth not shall be condemned." A latent condition is implied. He that believeth not shall be condemned, *if he continue in unbelief*. And he that sins against the Holy Spirit shall never be forgiven so long as he continues in an unyielding, unrepentant state. Athanasius remarks, "It deserves to be noted that Christ did not say, to him that blasphemeth and repenteth it shall be forgiven, but to him that blasphemes, that is, who perseveres in blasphemy," "for there is no sin," he adds, "which God will not pardon to them who sincerely and worthily repent." So then, instead of saying with Dorner that the declaration of Christ that the sin against the Holy Spirit hath no forgiveness "does not necessarily exclude deliverance through punishment," we would say that it does not necessarily exclude deliverance through repentance. Olshausen suggests that "this pas-

* A. Brown, in *The Evangelical Repository*, June, 1879.

sage is not overstrained if we infer that all other sins can be forgiven in the world to come, always supposing repentance and faith." But, supposing repentance and faith, why may not this sin also be forgiven in the world to come?

The stages through which a soul passes into this direful state are easily taken. Indifference is followed by cavilling, cavilling leads to irreverence, irreverence changes to scorn, scorn deepens to blasphemy. Whether this sin be sharp and sudden, or whether it be the last act in a long process of disobedience, in essence it is always the same; it is sin committed against light; it is sin against conviction. An insincere heart will reject the truth; an honest heart will respond to the truth. "Every one," says Jesus, "who is of the truth heareth my voice." Ignorant opposition to Christ does not necessarily show a rebellious heart, opposition to the Holy Spirit always does. A controversy, a collision takes place between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. The divine love is grieved, the divine reason is withstood, the divine light is quenched. The climax of human sin is at length reached, when as Calvin expresses it, "contempt is poured knowingly and willingly upon the Spirit of God."

We can now see why we are not to pray for this sin. It is "a sin unto death," a damning

sin, the only damning sin. Would it be becoming to ask God to forgive the impenitent? To pray that the impenitent may be led to repentance would be a proper prayer, but no pious soul asks God to forgive those who persistently refuse to yield to the sweet influences of his Spirit. Prayer is to be restrained in the presence of this sin not because there is a limit to the saving mercy of God; not because an ultimate moral state has been reached, from which there can be no recovery; not because there is a sin so heinous that the Holy Spirit turns away from the one who commits it, to strive with him no more; but because the impenitent heart is not in a condition profitably to receive forgiveness. On the divine side there is no bar to the salvation of any soul. "Him that cometh unto me," says Christ, "I will in no wise cast out." "There is no remedy, however, for the rejection of a remedy, no atonement for the rejection of atonement, no forgiveness for the rejection of forgiveness." Disobedience to the heavenly vision that comes unto every man, ends in darkness and death.

This sin, instead of being one that is unknown in the present age; instead of being one that is seldom reached, is alarmingly common. When Christ is known and rejected, when the life-and-death message of God's word is understood and disregarded, the sin against the Holy Ghost is

committed. For the scribes and Pharisees to ascribe the supernatural works of Christ to Satanic agency was to tread perilously near this precipice; for them malevolently to ascribe those works to Satanic agency *knowing better*, was to fall over the precipice, for in such a case Christ would be rejected understandingly, and the Spirit of God contemned.

Consider the circumstances in which Christ spake these words. A notable miracle had been wrought. Seeing how deeply the people were impressed, the scribes and Pharisees became jealous of the growing influence of Jesus. The great crisis to which things had been tending had come. The divine Spirit had taken the things of Christ and shown them unto those "blind leaders of the blind"; so that now they were brought to the decisive point of either acknowledging the claims of Jesus as a heaven-sent teacher, or of openly denying his claims, and placing themselves in an attitude of uncompromising hostility to his work. Within their hearts there was a struggle such as comes only once in the history of a human being. Over the mouth of an accusing conscience the unholy hand of restraint was placed, and the fatal choice was made. Instantly the heavens grew black. The soul was brought into condemnation. Whatever remnant of right feeling was left was

changed into gall and wormwood. Madly attempting to justify their opposition, and to give if possible, a death blow to the popularity of Jesus, they turned to the multitude and said: "This fellow doth not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons." What an outpouring of malice and contempt! To hint that He who is Incarnate Love had any connection with what was demoniac; to say that He who is Incarnate Purity was in league with "the god of filth," and had himself "an unclean spirit!" There is no deeper depth of blasphemy possible!

The reason why this sin is not pardoned must now appear evident. But here let the distinction be noted between a sin that is *unpardoned*, and one that is *unpardonable*. This sin is generally called "the unpardonable sin." Be it remembered, however, that the expression, "the unpardonable sin" is not Biblical. It is a theological coinage, which is in some measure responsible for obscuring thought upon the subject, for which it has stood as the accepted title. All that Scripture affirms is that the sin referred to "shall not be forgiven," "hath never forgiveness." It is not said that it is unpardonable, but that it is unpardoned; not that it cannot be pardoned, but that it shall not be pardoned. It is THE UNPARDONED SIN, because it im-

plies a condition of heart which the general mercy of God cannot pass by—a condition of heart that scorns to ask for pardon. Man has shut and bolted the door of his Spiritual habitation against the entrance of God's Spirit. He has committed spiritual suicide. Not that God is unwilling to forgive the vilest sinner, but he is forever unwilling to forgive the impenitent sinner. The one thing which makes it unsafe for God to forgive is the inward condition of the sinner. Where there is impenitence of heart, forgiveness would be hurtful to the individual, and to the interests of the moral universe. For continued impenitence there is no forgiveness in any age, or in any world; BUT, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

THE IRREMEDIABLE CONDITION.

"As touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."—Heb. vi. 4–6.

In the Gospels the sin against the Holy Ghost is represented as shutting the soul out from sal-

vation; here it is represented as keeping the backslidden soul from being renewed unto repentance. The central, the pivotal question is: What renders repentance impossible in the case here supposed? Is it God's unwillingness to forgive? No! a thousand times, no! Repentance is rendered impossible solely because of the unwillingness of the apostate to come into that condition or attitude in which repentance can have an existence.

Andrew Fuller grasps part of the truth when he says that "when the Scriptures speak of any sin as *unpardonable*, or of the *impossibility* of those who have committed it being renewed again to repentance, we are not to understand them as expressing any natural limitation to either the power of God or the mercy of God, nor yet of the efficacy of the Saviour's blood, but merely of a limitation dictated by sovereign wisdom and righteousness." The completed truth is that the limitation dictated by sovereign wisdom and righteousness is the limitation which springs from man's perversity, especially his perversity in excluding from his mind the truth that makes for repentance.

The key to unlock this text hangs on the door. The reason why the renewal of the evangelized Hebrews who should fall away was impossible, is given in the expression, "*seeing they crucify*,—

(that is, seeing they are crucifying,—seeing they continue to crucify—to themselves) the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." The only insuperable bar to repentance is continuing to crucify, in the heart, the Son of God afresh. So long as such hostility to Christ remains, repentance cannot come to the birth. Before the truth that softens the heart can enter to do its blessed work, there must be a complete change of spiritual attitude.

The starting-point in repentance is in the will. By an act of the will the mind is directed to the truth; from contemplation of the truth comes a change of mind; a change of mind results in a change of feeling; a change of feeling issues in a change of purpose and life. Any one may willfully refuse to see the truth, or seeing it refuse to follow it. The poet asks,

> "What if thine eye refuse to see,
> Thine ear of Heaven's free welcome fail,
> And thou a willing captive be,
> Thyself thy own dark jail?" *

The guiding light of truth shines in vain for those who turn away to wander recklessly in the darkness of sin; the message of wisdom, spoken as with the sweet seductive voice of a charmer, falls in vain upon deaf ears; the prison doors

* Whittier.

swing open in vain before the eyes of those who are the willing captives of evil. What *can* Heaven do for the souls that turn with averted face from the Christ of God? Those that come to Christ come to him freely. Faith is a free act. Even the mighty works of Christ did not necessitate faith; they could produce no force of conviction without the consent of the will. In the will lies the moral element of faith. Part of Paul's counsel to Timothy was this, "in meekness correcting those that oppose themselves, lest God should give them repentance, unto the knowledge of the truth." * Those who are to be tenderly corrected are said to *oppose themselves;* they oppose their own deepest convictions of truth, and promptings of duty; they oppose their better selves; and for what end? Lest, yielding to the divine voice speaking within them, they should be led to repentance. To the same effect are the significant words: "The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand *with their hearts,* and should be converted, and I should heal them." †

From the essential nature of man as a self-act-

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* 2 Tim. ii. 24. † Acts xxviii. 27.

ive being, ability is postulated to cleave to Christ or to turn from him, ability to bow the neck to his scepter or to break loose from his acknowledged authority. The planets move in their appointed orbits by necessity; man enters the service of Christ and remains in it freely. He may disown Christ with full knowledge of what he is doing. In common speech it is often said of those who do wrong that they know better than they do. This is true of every deserter from Christ's service. He knows better than he does. Having been illumined with light from Heaven, having come under the influence of the Gospel, his sin of defection is peculiarly sinful. He sins against light; he sins against the Holy Spirit, he sins against Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit, knowing and acknowledging that to Him his love and fealty should be given. And what follows? Turning away from Christ he falls away from righteousness.

It is a great sorrow to have a hopeful friendship turn to ashes; and the sorrow is deepened when to falseness is added ingratitude, and there is ground for the plaint, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." The ingratitude and hate of those whose sins he bore, form the nails that pierce the sacred heart of Christ. Those who turn against him crucify him afresh;

they enact over again, in spirit, the crucifixion scene. They open his wounds anew, and give him untold pain. Yea, more, they put him to an open shame; exposing him to the world's scorn. By leaving the circle of his followers and returning to the world, they virtually declare that they have not found in him what they expected. They cruelly insinuate that he has disappointed and deceived them.

Any one who could continue to subject Christ to such treatment might not be past repentance, but his repentance would itself be an impossibility so long as that spirit of resistance lasted; for it is a law of mind that repentance, being conditioned not only upon an impulse from within but upon a moving motive from without, can be produced only when the objects fitted to awaken holy and tender emotions are contemplated. "Then shall they look upon me whom they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son." Let the connection between *looking* and *mourning* be marked! Looking leads to mourning, and looking away leads to the instant congealing of every feeling of contrition which had already begun to flow. Those who turn away from beholding the Crucified Redeemer—those who hide their faces from His pitiful eyes whose look of tender rebuke would cut the conscience to the quick,

must remain unmoved to repentance. Ice cannot give heat, nor can the heart be melted to repentance when bent on vain or sinful things. The Sun of Righteousness cannot impart warmth and light to those who will not leave their dungeons of evil, and stand with uplifted face under his quickening beams. Christ, who in the case before us is assumed to be rejected, is the only object in the universe that can so affect the heart as to move it to godly repentance. But what are the beauties of Christ to one who closes tightly his spiritual eyes? What power can Calvary's love possess to change for the better any one who persists to live as if Christ were not? "A light tenderer than moon or sun may shine forever on," but it cannot reach and melt the heart that keeps itself hooded in unbelief. As it is impossible to pour water into a sealed vessel; as it is impossible to cure disease, if the all potent remedy be refused; so it is impossible for any one to be renewed again unto repentance who continues to crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

NO OTHER SACRIFICE.

"If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries."—Heb. x. 26.

Continuous sin, like continuous unbelief or impenitence, cuts the soul off from all part or lot in the salvation of Christ. "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." "If we sin (that is, if we continue in sin) there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." Not a single act, nor any definite number of acts of sin is indicated but a *state* of sin, the determinate choice of evil as a principle of life; such a fixed condition of moral perversity as is expressed in the words, "Evil, be thou my good!" Alford gives the sense of the passage when he says that it does not mean, "if we have willfully sinned," but, "if we be found willfully sinning." If at any point in our spiritual history; if in this world or in that, we be found in a state of wilful disobedience, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. It is not said that there remaineth no sacrifice for sin; but *no more* sacrifice, *no other* sacrifice than the divinely appointed and divinely approved sacrifice of Calvary. If there be defection from Christianity, if there be a willful and deliberate severing of the soul from Christ and his atoning sacrifice, the only satisfactory ground of hope is renounced. For those who know the one true sacrifice for sin, and casting it from them turn to the beggarly elements of the world, no other source of relief is left. Rejecting Heaven's only antidote they perish in their sins. Abandoning the only life-boat that can come

to their deliverance there remaineth nothing for them but a certain fearful expectation of a grave in the whelming deep of judgment. Apart from Christ, the source of life, no soul can live. Except the branch abide in the vine it withers and dies. A movement from the tropics of grace to the arctic region of the law cannot be made without fatal consequences. For how can the tender flowers of virtue that drooped and withered when blessed with genial sunshine and showers, hope to grow amid snow and ice?

Calvary was no experiment. It was the consummation of God's remedial scheme. Love like water finds its level. At the Cross the love of God reached its highest point. Beyond the gift of his Son, God cannot go. It is vain to expect, in the far away future, some higher manifestation of saving power. Let no one think that those who have not been won to moral goodness by the Cross will be recovered in some other way. All such hope is excluded by the declaration that for those who in the exercise of conscious freedom have stepped outside the circle of redeeming grace, "there remaineth no other sacrifice for sin." Having withdrawn themselves from the sphere in which divine grace most powerfully operates, and having surmounted everything that might have arrested their fatal course, they move with fast diminishing attraction from the

great center of life, into outer and utter darkness. Not that the virtue of Christ's sacrifice can be exhausted by the most aggravated sin; not that the divine store of mercy can ever run out, so that to the hungry, famishing soul there is not a crumb to give. The sacrifice of Christ remaineth in all its glorious sufficiency and efficiency, but its benefits do not reach those who surrender themselves to sin. A state of willful sin dissolves the connection between the soul and Christ. "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby." Faith continues to grow only so long as it is kept rooted in the soil of a pure life. Christ saves not *in*, but *from* sin. An old writer says, "It is not falling into the water that drowns, but lying in it; so it is not falling into sin that damns, but continuing in it." The blackest apostate may recover himself and renew his confidence in the Redeemer; although sorely wounded he may rally and resume the conflict; by deeds meet for repentance he may wipe out the disgrace of the past; in the sacrifice once slighted he may again find all that he desires and requires; but the apostate that remains in a state of willful alienation from Christ, and attachment to sin, forfeits forever all interest in Christ and his great salvation.

Very little account is taken in Scripture of

mere heresy of belief; heresies of the heart and life being the evils specially condemned. There is, however, one doctrine singled out, the denial of which brings certain judgment. Using a strong adjective the apostle Peter speaks of certain false teachers as "bringing in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them." * To deny Christ is the heresy of heresies. It is the very "schism of perdition." But to deny Christ, and to deny human dogmas regarding him, are two very different things. Many a soul bows reverently before the Master, while honestly rejecting human theories that have been formed concerning his person and work. Many who look upon the Gospels as beautiful legends bow before the peerless life which they portray, giving to it the deepest homage of their hearts, and making it the object of their loving imitation. The Christ whom they deny is some fancied Christ of their own; the Christ whom they ignorantly worship is "the Lord that bought them." Forsaking the beaten orthodox path they come round to Christ by another way. Conforming their lives to the perfect pattern shown to them on the Mount, they unconsciously take the Man of Nazareth as their inspiration and model. Happy are those who

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* 2 Peter ii. 1.

thus, in spite of conflicting theories, in spite of defective knowledge, and in spite of imperfect faith touching Christ and his atonement, reach the glorious reality which lies at the center of Christian doctrine! Happy are those who, ascending above the fogs of abstract speculation, soar into the clear light of devout contemplation, worshipping the real Christ in the Ideal! Not any theory of the Divinity of Christ, but the Divine Christ himself, the living, loving, personal Redeemer, is the foundation upon which saving faith rests; the living Head in which all the faithful are united. Separation from him is the deadly schism, bringing ruin, swift and irremediable. Separation from the real or ideal Christ, means disconnection from remedial influences—and hence from the hope of spiritual improvement. When love of sin grows stronger, and love to Christ grows weaker, the tie that binds to Christ is finally sundered, and the last, the only resort given up. Who can succeed where Christ has failed? Hope goes out in the blackness of despair when his sacrifice is discarded; for the whole universe affords *no other* remedy for sin. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "And in none other is there salvation, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."

Because of the essential relation of Christ to humanity every man has some kind of connection with him. He is set for the falling and rising up of all men. Some are guided by the light of his Cross to pardon, purity and peace; others wound and damage their moral natures by dashing themselves against the Cross—as seabirds sweeping up out of the darkness dash themselves against a friendly lighthouse. Some welcome and accept him, in whatever form he comes, and he becomes to them the rock upon which they build the temple of a holy life; others reject him in ignorance, and he becomes unto them "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"—upon which they carelessly strike in the dark, and are bruised; others consciously reject him, and to them he becomes "the Head Stone of the corner" which from its elevation at the top of the building falls upon them in crushing, destroying judgment; grinding them to powder.

XI.

THE CHIEF DANGER-POINT.

"Such is the constitution of things that unwillingness to goodness may ripen into voluntary opposition to it."—MÜLLER.

"At last I heard a voice upon the slope
Cry to the summit, 'Is there any hope?'
To which an answer pealed from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand;
And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn
God made himself an awful rose of dawn."

TENNYSON (*The Vision of Sin*).

"Forever round the mercy-seat
The guiding lights of Love shall burn;
But what if, habit-bound, thy feet
Shall lack the will to turn?"

WHITTIER.

XI.

THE CHIEF DANGER-POINT.

UPON the chart of Scripture the maëlstrom of "eternal sin"* is laid down as the chief danger-point in the voyage of moral existence. Toward that dread maëlstrom every voyager who has deviated from the prescribed course is being steadily carried, to be caught at length in the fateful embrace of its swirling currents. "In danger," not "of *an* eternal sin," but "of eternal sin," is the exact thought of the portentous words of Christ. It is not a single act of sin, but a state of bondage to sin, that is indicated. Through the inevitable tendency of sin towards permanence, every one who has entered upon the downward path of willful opposition to divine authority is in danger of becoming fixed in a state of eternal opposition to God. Sin has gotten him in its iron, relentless grip, and he is in danger of being held in its grip forever. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and

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* Mark iii. 29.

he shall be holden with the cords of the sin,—" holden with the cords of his sin as the ship is held by the anchor which lies at the bottom of the sea firmly embedded in the mud.

The suggestion of the possibility and danger of eternal sin sheds a lurid light upon the problem of the future life. One thing is made clear:—the next world is a continuation of the present, grows out of it, is governed by the same laws, and is embraced in the empire of the same King. Death works no essential change in human nature or in human character. Every man goes on in the next life as he is headed in this; his character continuing to improve or degenerate according to the bent which has here been given to it. Character is reproductive, self-perpetuating. In every sinner there is a tendency to sin, in every saint a tendency to goodness. Persistence in any moral course leads to an even increasing momentum. Everywhere in the Spiritual Kingdom, the law of increase obtains: "Unto him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance." The reproductive power of character is endless. Every life is a tree yielding fruit "whose seed is in itself." "Every action," says Richter, "becomes more certainly an eternal mother than an eternal daughter." So that although freedom can never change to fate, every life pursuing its own free

course along the line of natural development must pass on to the great crisis when the seal of destiny is fixed upon character, and the Lord shall say, "He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness yet more; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy yet more; and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness yet more; and he that is holy, let him be made holy yet more."

Moral rewards, whether in the present or in the future life, are not outward and arbitrary. They consist in the perpetuation of character. Men receive the very things done in the body. Whatsoever they sow, *that* they also reap. The reward of holiness is more holiness; the reward of sin is more sin. The crown of the righteous is a crown of righteousness. Heaven and hell are permanent when that out of which they are made is permanent. So long as a soul grows in holiness the gates of the new Jersualem may stand open day and night, but there will be no desire to go out: so long as a soul by continuing to sin adds fresh fuel to the fire, hell can never burn itself out, but must be "the fire that is not quenched."

But while it is beyond question that character through the accumulation of moral force leads to fixedness, it ought to be carefully noted that fixedness of character is not the obliterating

from the soul of all power of self-movement, it is not the literal changing of the heart into stone. Contrariwise, it is a voluntary condition, a condition of moral permanence resulting from fixity of choice. Eternal sin is the eternal voluntary opposition of the soul to goodness and to God. A state of eternal sin there could not possibly be if the moral nature of man had given the last flutter of expiring power, and had become unchangeably fixed not merely in choice, but in powerlessness to choose. The steadfast holding on to a fixed and settled purpose does not mean the surrender of liberty of choice. The saint and the sinner do not lose their liberty of choice when they persevere to the end in their respective moral courses; Satan does not lose his liberty of choice when he says of evil, 'Be thou my good!' the Redeemed in heaven do not lose their liberty of choice when they remain forever within the walls of the City whose gates are shut neither by day nor by night. Sin and righteousness must needs be continuously chosen. They are moral states because they are voluntary states. Neither here nor hereafter will they or can they be made compulsory.

If God by the exercise of omnipotent will could make men good, he could just as easily have kept them from becoming bad. And why did he not do so? Why did he create a being

capable of sinning? Rather ask, Why did he create a *moral* being at all? Why did he create a man? A *thing* he could create incapable of sinning, a *man* he could not. In the creation of a free, finite being the capability and hence the possibility of sinning is necessarily involved. Professor Huxley could therefore hardly have counted the cost when he declared, "If I could be turned into a clock and wound up every morning in order to be made to think and do what is right, I would instantly close with the offer." What! be willing to be made incapable of doing wrong at the price of having all moral power destroyed? Be willing to be changed from an imperfect man into a perfect machine? Be willing to be reduced from a man to a thing? To all who express such a preference it is enough to answer, "Ye know not what ye ask."

Those who imagine that God can deal with souls as he does with stars, are often at a loss to understand why he does not stir up his strength, and by some summary process bring every wanderer back, and compel him to move in his proper orbit. "Just a little more divine pressure upon the souls of men, which should come as softly as vernal breezes, and the work might soon be done." * Indeed! Is it so easy? If

* *Eternal Atonement.* R. A. Hitchcock, p. 305.

that is all that is required, strange that God should delay! Would *you* withhold the pressure that would make virtue a necessity, if it was in your power to give it? But, has God the power, when moral means prove insufficient, to bear down upon man and compel him to be good? Can he *force* him to become a *volunteer;* or can he force him to act against his will? He cannot. Are not all things possible with God? Yes, all things that do not imply a contradiction, which the very idea of compulsory goodness does. If pressure could take the place of persuasion, there is no reason why God should continue to labor and to wait. If a touch of the finger of Omnipotence could make men good, we turn with wonder to the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and ask: "Wherefore all this waste?"

Nothing is more certain than that character is always self-chosen. Coerce the free spirit of man God could not if he would, and would not if he could. The same cloud of mystery hangs around the origin of obedience that hangs around the origin of sin. Both originate in the will. Every moral act is performed; every moral state is entered into, and continued in, by deliberate choice. Character being self-chosen, it necessarily follows that it must continue subject to modification and change. At the same time it is possible for character, without losing a single

essential moral quality, to harden into a shape which it is certain to retain. Although changeable it may never change. Who has not seen men come, in a few years, under the power of evil habits which have held complete mastery over them to the end of life? With ever increasing rapidity bad habits grow; around their victims they coil in ever tightening embrace; and while no one dare say they cannot be shaken off, yet knowing the experience of the past, reading in the present a prophecy of the future, we have every reason to fear that they will not. When men have made a willing surrender of themselves to the power of evil, they are held captive by it —prisoners in chains. They have come into a state of moral bondage, which, in spite of continued opportunities of escape, may last forever.

Not from lack of power but from the absence of will to use the power possessed, does any one remain bound in the fetters of sin. Power is often present when unemployed. There is much latent, unused power, power which may never be brought into exercise, but for the right exercise of which the possessor will nevertheless be held to a strict account. Increased unwillingness to act is part of the penalty which follows the delay of moral action. Indolence breeds apathy. As the call of duty is put off indisposition increases until at length all desire to act fades out of the soul.

Another count in the penalty of sinful inactivity, and by no means the smallest, is the loss of power which it entails. Power unused decays; power thrown away never returns. The stiffened joint never regains its wonted suppleness; the withered limb never regains its wonted strength. Of many it may be said, "By not using their souls they lost them;" of still more, By abusing their souls they lost them. It is in the degeneration of the moral nature itself that the direct effects of sin are seen. Sin smites the soul with spiritual atrophy and thereby "worketh death." "The development of evil," says Müller, "ends in a state wherein unwillingness to goodness has ripened into inability, wherein personality persisting in alienation from God becomes absolutely petrified into sin." And as spiritual power declines it comes to pass that

> "He that wold not when he might,
> He shall not when he wold-a.*"

As the life-forces of the soul recede more and more into the root, the budding forth of effort to reform grows feebler and feebler, until at last the moral nature that might have been found bending low with clusters of rich, ripe fruit, stands forth in utter nakedness a withered tree, which is

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* Percy.

henceforth good for nothing but to serve as fuel for the everlasting burning.

In the doctrine of "eternal sin," the question of future punishment is approached from the moral side; and this is fortunately the side from which, in the present day, it is being more and more approached and studied. The thought is becoming clearer that the main thing to be dreaded is not eternal punishment, but eternal sin; not the possible interminableness of punitive suffering but the possible interminableness of opposition to the will of God. All the effort of God in redemption is to save from sin, and especially from the dreadful end of fixedness in sin. Christ is the Redeemer from sin. He came to deliver man from the power of sin, to help man to break away from sin, to prevent man from hardening into a state of continued and eternal bondage to sin. Seeking a moral end he depends upon moral forces, and appeals to moral motives. The one thing which he emphasizes is *character;* destiny being regarded as simply a question of moral tendency. Is evil prevailing over good, or good over evil? Is the brute gaining ascendency over the angel, or the angel over the brute? If the former, a character is being formed prophetic of eternal sin and misery; if the latter, a character is being formed prophetic of eternal righteousness and joy. Only by keep-

ing hell out of man can man be kept out of hell. Only by cleansing character from sin can salvation from punishment be secured; for sin and punishment are coëxistent, coëxtensive. They are related to each other as substance to shadow; cause to effect. Punishment is not outward and arbitrary but inward and moral. Every man is punished through the law of his own being. Eternal sin brings eternal punishment, *is* eternal punishment. As long as man is held fast in the power of sin it is not in the nature of things possible that he can escape from the punishment which it involves. "If you were blind," said Jesus to the Jews, "ye would have no sin; but, now ye say We see, your sin *remaineth*"—that is, it is not blotted out or taken away. And where sin remains condemnation remains. So long as man continues to sin he will continue to gather into his bosom the penalty of sin. An unholy being will always be a consuming fire unto himself. "The unquenchable fire" will burn on unhindered in the sinning soul until its work is done.

Were the punishment of sin something outwardly imposed, reason and conscience would rise up in open revolt against the idea of its interminableness. For sin is not an infinite offense. Such a thing as an infinite evil there cannot be. There is only one infinite and that is the Infinite

Good—which is *God*. Many, fixing their thought upon the finitude of sin, and overlooking the true nature of punishment ask: "If sin be finite may not the penalty of it run out; may not the sinner pay his debt unto the uttermost farthing, and be delivered from the prison-house of retribution?" This blessed possibility admitted, another fearful possibility remains—a possibility in which lies the real difficulty in the way of the ultimate restoration of a lost soul, and that is the possibility that he may continue to incur fresh debts; the possibility that he may be held forever a willing captive in the dungeon of evil; the possibility—yea, the danger—that the sin which now holds him in its grasp may hold him in its grasp forever.

But while it is true that eternal persistence in sin is the only valid ground of eternal punishment, there is a modified sense in which the punishment of every sin is eternal. Every sin brings eternal loss. When Jesus, describing the final judgment, said regarding the left-hand division: "These shall go away into the punishment of the ages," he evidently saw in their sinful selfishness something that would be to them a continual source of self-inflicted misery. The future world could never be to them what it might have been if they had spent their lives on earth as ministering angels to the poor and the oppressed.

Because of the non-development of the spirit of benevolence they would suffer age-lasting loss, age-lasting punishment. Their case strikingly illustrates the principle of punishment by loss, which is everywhere in operation. As the child is punished in the home by the curtailment of privilege, the civil offender by the deprivation of liberty, so the unbenevolent are punished, here and hereafter, by the loss of happiness, the loss of Heaven. In the universe of God things are so ordered that it never pays to do wrong, or to omit the performance of the smallest righteous act. All sin results in self-injury. "He that sinneth against me," God had said, "wrongeth his own soul." In the punishment of sin there is something which no direct act of Almighty power can lift from off the soul. Even if sin be forgiven, the restored child, happy in his Father's love, has to suffer the natural and necessary effect of his wrong-doing. Although his sin is blotted out, so that it no longer disturbs the relation of friendship between him and God, many sad traces of it are left. Where the thorn has been extracted a painful spot remains. The damage wrought by sin is not repaired; wasted energies are not restored; the vigor and elasticity of youth are not brought back; the vanished years of a misspent life are not recalled. At the very moment when the prodigal is being pressed

in gladness and joy to the Father's bosom, the shame of his sin burns hotly within his heart. The evil effects of his former state he cannot lay aside as he does his rags ; they follow him from the far country into the Father's house and cling to him forever.

Let the distinction then be noted between the soul that sins eternally, and is eternally lost ; and the soul that having sinned sustains eternal loss. Those who sin, even if they should afterwards repent, suffer loss : those who continue in sin are lost—the curse of sin is with them unlifted, the suffering of sin unrelieved. To be saved from the punishment of sin they must be saved from sin itself. Here we are confronted with the question : Will all, or any, be saved from sin in the future ? What ground is there to hope that the lost will be found, the dead be made alive ? May not punishment for sin be redemptive ? May not every case in which suffering is inflicted be a case in which suffering is the only remedy ? May not every case in which a soul is cast into the lake of fire, be a case in which the fires of judgment are the only possible purgation ? What light, if any, is thrown upon the problem by the expressions "eternal sin" and "eternal punishment" ? Dean Plumptre contends that the qualifying word *aionios*, which in the present discussion has been

somewhat freely rendered *eternal*, expresses "*undefined* and not *infinite* duration." Had he contented himself with saying that it expresses *undefined duration*, his assertion would have been correct. The literal meaning of *aionios* is "age-long." As to whether sin and punishment are limited in duration or absolutely eternal *aionios* is entirely non-committal. It tells how long they may last, not how long they will last. But while it expresses undefined duration, it suggests no idea of limitation; the prospect which it opens up is one which has no *visible* bound; the road which it brings into view is one which has no *visible* terminus. If the claim be allowed that it does not forbid hope; in the interests of truth it must be added, that it does not give hope.

From the appalling possibility of continuous sin and suffering, relief has been sought in the literal destruction of the irreclaimably wicked. It has been thought that after the present epoch of redemption has run to a close there will be left a moral rubbish heap, which will be burned up, as the chaff of the Eastern threshing-floor—a rubbish heap containing no undeveloped germs of goodness, but composed entirely of that which is intrinsically bad, and hopelessly irreclaimable. Unfed by the oil of grace, which Christ supplies, the flame of the spirit-life will burn lower and still lower; until too feeble to live, it will flicker

and expire. Under the destroying power of sin the soul will shrink and shrivel, steadily going down in the volume and quality of being, until the moral powers are dwarfed, the moral sensibilities blunted and benumbed; so that not only is there loss of happiness, but also loss of the power of happiness; and, by parity of reasoning, not only is there a diminishing of suffering, but also a diminishing of capacity for suffering. The man who sins is less of a *man* than he was before; the man who continues in sin ultimately loses every vestige of manhood; sinking down into moral nothingness, perishing in his own corruption. This, it is held, is "the second death;" not the death of something in man, but the death, the literal *dissolution*, of man himself. In support of this theory it is triumphantly asked, Do not the destructive processes of nature show degeneration passing on to mortification, and mortification ending in death? But it is forgotten that natural processes are merely analogies of spiritual processes. Spiritual death is self-destruction—the voluntary separation of the soul from God. As the life that is in Christ is spiritual, the death that is out of Christ is also spiritual. Eternal sin and eternal death are one.

Vain are all attempts to fill up the bottomless pit; to exhaust it of its darkness; or to sink a shaft into it, in the hope of finding light on the

other side. The bottomless pit remains, but it remains open. Those who have their place in it, are there in spite of the unwearied efforts of Divine Love to turn them back from such a doleful end. Do not those who stay in it, stay in it in spite of all the efforts of Divine Love to lift them out? Is it asked: How does such a supposition comport with the words addressed by Abraham to the nameless rich man in Hades: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they which would pass from hence to you may not be able, and none may cross over from thence to us"? It might be enough to say in reply, that these words do not refer to everlasting condemnation or salvation, but to "an *as yet* unalterable" state of things in Hades—the abode of disembodied spirits during the interim between death and the resurrection. But, passing that over, the words as used have clearly a restricted application. The rich man had prayed Abraham to send Lazarus to him to alleviate his misery; to which request Abraham answered that "no intercourse could be held between Paradise and Gehenna, and *on this account* a vast and impassable chasm existed between the two." (So Edersheim.) The intervening space is not a mere hand-breadth, as the Jewish Rabbins pictured it, but a yawning impassable abyss, "which cannot be overleaped by presumption on the one

hand, or sympathy on the other." (So Stier.) No wishing or willing can waft a soul across this dividing gulf. No power divine can bridge it over; for it represents the separation of souls according to essential character. But while there can be no intercommunication, no voluntary passing to and fro, so long as character remains unchanged; there is nothing to preclude the idea of possible transition on the ground of change of character; and the possibility of change of character will at once be conceded by those who accept the axiomatic dictum that no state of conscious being can be considered *moral* in which only one course of action is possible. But, dreading to push a divine philosophy to the point where it might become "a chartered recklessness," a reverent faith pausing here on the edge of the mountain-precipice to which that philosophy has led, plants her standard on this truth: "The mercy of the Lord endureth *forever*." "Beyond the infinite and boundless reach of mercy" none can pass. Infinite love can neither change nor die, but must live through eternity, eternally striving to overcome the perversity of every creature's will. The wings of the Almighty are never folded, but are always invitingly outspread, that under them may be lovingly gathered those (if any such there be) who in the fire of suffering have learned lessons of spirit-

ual wisdom, and have sought to return to their rest.

We thus find the danger-point in moral existence where Christ locates it,—in man himself, and not in God. The outer, utter darkness, into which no blessed light of comfort enters, is the darkness in which a sin-loving soul has enveloped himself. Not because of sin committed in the past which the mercy of Heaven cannot cancel; not because of any restraint of the moral faculties by which moral change is made impossible; but because of mercy eternally rejected;—because of sin freely, continuously and eternally committed—does the dark cloud of condemnation settle down upon any soul, enwrapping him in the impenetrable gloom of an eternal night.

XII.

THE FLUIDITY OF CHARACTER.

"A good will is the greatest thing in the universe."—KANT.

"A character is a completely formed will."—NOVALIS.

"He had thought about it, prayed about it, and half resolved to do it, for a long time. At last one day the resolution leaped forth full grown into a very decided 'I'll do it,' and the ash stick came down with an equally vigorous, '*Amen.*'"

—*From a Homily by* MISTER HORN.

"Man is his own star, and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all fate.
Nothing to him falls early, or too late."

FLETCHER.

"In the transactions between God and the souls of men, with respect unto their obedience and salvation, there is none of them but hath a *power* in sundry things, as to some degrees and measures of them, to comply with his mind and will, which they voluntarily neglect."—JOHN OWEN.

XII.

THE FLUIDITY OF CHARACTER.

THERE are two elements which, entering into life, make it probationary down to the last atom: namely, human freedom and divine grace; the one constituting the ground of man's probation as a *moral* being, the other constituting the ground of his probation as a *sinful* moral being. By emptying life of either of these elements it is robbed of the moral significance which has usually been attached to it. Take away the free agency of man, and the very possibility of probation is taken away; for if man be not free to choose his destiny, his life on earth is in no true sense a state of moral discipline and trial. By making human fate hang upon the Absolute Will and not upon the supreme and ultimate choice of the individual, the foundation of responsibility is undermined, and man is stripped of all the essential qualities of a moral being. On the other hand, eliminate from life the universal operations of divine grace, and the idea of *adequate* probation is destroyed; for since

apart from Christ—in whom is treasured up, and through whom is distributed the fullness of divine grace—man as a fallen being cannot attain unto salvation, apart from Christ man cannot have a probation suitable to his present circumstances and needs. And inasmuch as the very conditions which render probation possible render salvation possible, the redeemability or salvability of man must depend upon the possibility of originating moral change, and the capacity for receiving divine influences and responding to them.

Possibility of moral change is inseparable from moral character. If from any cause moral change were to become impossible, it would be a sign that moral annihilation had already taken place. As a moral being man possesses power of self-action, power to put forth moral effort, power to bring to pass, within certain limits, results which he has before determined. He can change and modify the future, yea, he can create the future. His future is what he chooses to make it.

The appeals of Scripture are themselves sufficient to prove that in Heaven's estimation at least, no one to whom they are addressed has passed beyond the possibility of altering his moral course. After those who have wandered furthest in the downward path of evil, is the word of tender entreaty sent, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die." Inability to turn to God is

purely moral. Those who cannot repent are not those who are unable, but those who are unwilling to repent. Those who "cannot cease from sin" are not those who have no power, but those who have no disposition to abandon sin. As sinful habit roots itself deeper and deeper in the soil of the depraved heart, "will not" passes into "cannot." But "cannot" is always translatable back again into "will not." For the bondage of sin is always a willing bondage; and the only insuperable obstacle in the way of a sinner's return to God is his own unwillingness.

With the strong tendency towards individualism which came into New England theology as a natural reaction from the over-development of the idea of corporate responsibility by a state church, special emphasis was given to the doctrine of man's inherent ability as a moral being to repent of his sin, and keep the commandments of God. Natural inability was stoutly rebutted, and the moral enfranchisement of every man openly declared that the dormant conscience might be aroused, and the conviction of moral responsibility pressed home upon every individual heart. It is largely owing to the influence of New England theology upon Christian thought that there has come to be substantial agreement upon the point that in things moral *can* is the measure of *ought*. No longer is it

questioned that ability and responsibility are equal; that only what a man can do is he under obligation to do, and that what he cannot do, he is in no wise bound to do. If power to repent and obey God be taken away, repentance and righteousness cease to be duties; and all blameworthiness for their absence is completely cancelled. Unless man should cease to be what he now is—a moral being, some measure of moral power must be continued to him forever, together with some measure of opportunity for the exercise of that power. If in this world, or in any other world, moral power and opportunity be utterly lost, moral identity is lost; the sense of duty which is always present in a moral nature is destroyed, yea, the moral nature itself is blotted out. So long as a human being remains a moral being, he must continue to sow new crops of moral actions, and reap new harvests of punishment and reward.

Not unfrequently is the question raised: "Can it be supposed that any one will be consigned to eternal woe who is still capable of redemption?" * This question assumes that those only who are incapable of redemption, that is to say, those who are incapable of moral change, will be consigned to eternal woe. But is it possible to conceive of self-conscious punishment inflicted upon moral

* Ed. Article in *Andover Review*, May, 1887.

incapables? Is it not universally conceded that "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched" are the remorse of a guilty conscience in which the double sense of moral responsibility and moral ability still lingers? Were the divine government to visit punishment upon those who are incapable of reformation, would not the same principle of equity be violated as in the case of an earthly government that should visit punishment upon hopeless imbeciles and idiots?

From a new quarter the destruction of human freedom and responsibility is being threatened. Birth and education are said to determine human conduct: every volition is said to be a link in an endless chain of causation; and character the necessary sequence, the natural product, of certain antecedent states and influences. In this there is a measure of truth and a measure of error. Unity and continuity do unquestionably belong to character. No single action stands isolated from past choices and conditions. The present grows out of the past, the future out of the present. When Homer exclaimed, "I am part of all that I have met," he might have added, "and of all that I have been or done." But, behind all the subtle influences of heredity and environment, behind the conflicting motives by which the moral nature is beset and besieged, behind the resultant

tendencies of previous moral states, there is a potent personality, which is the sole determining power in moral action. By things outside the moral nature character is influenced but not determined, conditioned but not controlled, affected but not caused. Man is himself the *cause* of his own character. Motives impel but do not compel his inner choice. Never is he forced to act in a way to which he has already been predestined. The limitations which life imposes and the opportunities which life affords he may accept as necessary elements in the scheme of his existence, and within that appointed circle by which his life is bounded he may freely work out his own destiny; running with patience the race set before him, and finishing his course with joy.

Those who have undertaken to forecast the character and destiny of man from his constitution and environment have too often overlooked the province of the will as a self-determining power. It is as if some one observing the movement of the clouds should conclude that the ship could move only in the same direction; forgetting that the captain with his hand upon the helm can use the wind so as to steer his ship in a course almost the opposite of that to which the wind is blowing. Without this self-determining power virtue would be an impossibility. To act

virtuously man has often to cleave his way against the strong current of desire. Closing his ears to the seductive voice of his evil, selfish nature, and opening his ears to the protest of his higher nature, he has to urge his reluctant feet to walk in the path of righteousness and self-denial. "In the united states of thought and feeling the will occupies the position of a President," against whose decisions there exists no power of veto. Within the inner kingdom of self, the will rules with regal power holding in subjection "the fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Spurning the pleasurable because it is also the sinful, the will often chooses the unpleasant because it is also the right. As saith the judicious Hooker: "Appetite is the will's solicitor, and the will is appetite's controller; what we covet according to the one, by the other we often reject."

To the question: "Up to what point is man capable of redemption?" there can be only one answer. Man is capable of redemption up to the point of the extinction of his moral nature. So long as a shred of moral power is left there is the possibility of moral recovery. For character is not like a vase or statue which when once shattered is forever hopelessly destroyed. Rather is it like a living organism which though maimed and injured may be restored to soundness. Character is vital and changing, not dead and sterotyped.

It is like liquid metal that can be fashioned into any shape, and not like metal which has been run into a mould, and has become solid and unalterable. Even when it has become in some degree hardened it may be remelted in the furnace of repentance. Character is germinal and structural: while it lives it grows, and while it grows it changes; and when it changes for the worse there is always the possibility that it may yet change for the better. However pitiable the wreck of manhood, there is always left some remnant of self-determining power, some measure of ability to leave the dismal swamp of sinful indulgence for the bracing uplands of virtuous self-restraint. Out of the deepest "slough of despond" the soul may struggle and gain at last the Celestial City. The most abject moral serf may assert his inborn nobility of nature and become "a crowned King of Life." Everything hangs upon the fiat of the will. Since in the will lies the reforming power—the power to originate change—reformation can be secured only by rousing it to action. "*Wilt* thou be made whole?" is the question which the Great Healer puts to every sin-sick soul. And when any one gathers up his wasted energies for a supreme effort—when at the bidding of the Lord he stretches forth his withered hand—life and health return.

Capacity to receive divine knowledge and influence and to respond to them, is inseparable from moral character. The question of the Lord of Life is not, "Wilt thou heal thyself?" but, "Wilt thou be *made* whole? Wilt thou submit to my healing touch? Wilt thou give up thy case into my hands, that I may make thee whole?"

The redeemability of man lies in his ability to avail himself of the healing power of Christ; his ability to receive what Christ has come to impart. Through the corrupting influence of sin, the moral nature of man has undergone deterioration until it has lost all recuperative power. As a fallen nature it is "indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good." But it is painting the picture in darker hues than need be, to say that man is incapable of doing good, and capable only of sinning. It is enough to say that he has sustained a loss of power to do good, and that for the healthy, normal exercise of his spiritual nature he is dependent upon the efficacious grace of God. "A gracious ability has been given him whereby he can co-operate with the Spirit of God" in his own redemption. Within his moral nature there is a vital center of causation which can respond to the quickening and fructifying power of the Spirit. To secure his co-operation with the constant operations of

divine grace is to secure his salvation. Just as the one end of all the curative agencies which medical science has discovered and adopted is to stir up the latent forces of corporeal life, that the attacks of disease may be repelled; so the one end of all the efforts of the Great Physician is to stir up the latent forces of spiritual life, that sin may be expelled, and the moral nature be made whole, and kept whole. Into the man of receptive heart God enters, making Himself the health of his countenance; filling all the currents of his life with new energy; stimulating and strengthening his enfeebled moral nature, leading him "to will and to work, for His good pleasure;" and thus through the power which He himself imparts enabling him to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Holding within himself the possibility of redemption, man has no right to remain under the power of evil. If he cannot heal himself, it is equally true that he cannot be healed *apart from his own action in the matter.* Human agency must interblend with divine agency. But the uncertain factor is never the divine one. God is always willing, always able, but man is not always ready. The ability to open his nature to the incoming of the energizing, life-giving Spirit is God's special gift of grace to the children of men. The faith by which we are saved is not of ourselves, it is the

gift of God. To every man God "hath dealt out a measure of faith," * that is, a measure of the faith faculty, a measure of the faculty which enables him to receive divine truth and grace. Every man is constituted capable of receiving divine help; for "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." To every man has been given power to make the decisive choice between life and death; power to move forward towards the source of his life, or to turn away from it; power to bring God into his soul or to shut him out. At the very thought of such an endowment of power well may he tremble. It is the possession of this power that makes him the arbiter of his own destiny. The eternal life which he is helpless to create, he can reject or receive. Rejecting that life, made over to him in Christ, he cuts himself off from the one source of remedial influence, and dies in his sins. Receiving that life he is made a partaker of the divine nature, and is thus constituted one of the spiritual children of God. For unto as many as receive Christ to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. There is thus a volitional, and hence a moral element, in faith. Faith is a free and responsible act. The plaint

* Rom. xii. 3.

of the Saviour is not that men cannot, but that they will not, come unto him that they might have life. None are so helpless as those that will not come. None are so blind as those that will not see. Lord Nelson could not see the signal for suspending the battle because he had purposely placed his glass to his blind eye. And many see not the truth because they have no mind to do so. Is it urged that man being "dead in trespasses and sins," is bereft of all power of moral action, and that he is unable to repent and turn to Christ? To such a conclusion Scripture lends no countenance. There the blind are called upon to look, the deaf to hear, the sleeper to awake, the dead to rise up. "Look, ye blind! Hear, ye deaf! Awake, thou that sleepest, *and arise from the dead*, and Christ shall give thee light."

Trace the faith faculty back to its primal root, and it will be found growing out of the capacity for worship which belongs to man as a religious being. Power to receive the divine, susceptibility to divine influence, capacity to receive instruction in divine things, ability to render worshipful obedience to the divine being, mark man off as the possessor of a religious nature. Isolated races of men may have been discovered who were destitute of definite religious ideas, but no race of men has ever been found sunk so low

as to be incapable of religious culture. The first Portuguese settlers at Cape Colony maintained that the Hottentots were "a race of apes incapable of christianization; and over their church doors they placed the warning sign, "Dogs and Hottentots not admitted." But time has showed that those degraded Hottentots are possessed of a religious nature, that they too are God's children, and that they are capable of restoration into the divine image.

When the first missionaries landed at Madagascar the French Governor called out, "So you will make the Malagsay, Christians? Impossible! they are mere brutes, and have no more sense than irrational creatures; you might as well try to convert cattle." Touched with the living power of the Gospel of Christ these "irrational brutes" have been transformed into devout worshipers of the one living and true God, and their island home, once the abode of horrid cruelty, has become a center of light and salvation unto surrounding heathen nations.

When Charles Darwin, the naturalist, first visited the island of Tierra del Fuego he thought that he had discovered a race of men destitute of religious sentiments, if not destitute of a religious nature. He was mistaken. Even in that debased people seeds of religious life lay dor-

mant waiting for the sunshine of the gospel to fructify them. A humble missionary brought to them the word of life, and they became new men in Christ Jesus. And when, after the interval of a number of years Mr. Darwin again visited that island, and found that these brutal savages had developed into Christian disciples, he bore honorable testimony to the moral transformation that had been accomplished; ascribing, with noble frankness, the entire change to the elevating power of the Gospel of Christ.

The twofold reason why the Gospel finds a responsive echo in the universal human heart is that the Gospel was made for man, and man was made for redemption by the Gospel. Inextinguishable desires after a higher life are met by divine help to reach the loftiest ideals. Prophecies of redemption written in the nature of man find their fulfillment when Christ comes into possession of his own.

Continuous effort on the part of God to arouse man to struggle for deliverance from the dominion of evil, puts to shame the faintest shadow of suspicion that any soul has been foredoomed to certain and inevitable defeat. Would God bestir himself if the case were hopeless? Would he provide sufficiency of means if recovery were impossible? Would he awaken aspiration if en-

deavor were vain? Would he induce any one to lift heavenward the empty vessel of faith, if there were no descending showers of grace by which it might be filled?

XIII.

JUDICIAL BLINDNESS.

"Till their own dreams at length deceive 'em,
And, oft repeating, men believe 'em."

PRIOR.

"It is one of the heaviest penalties of wrong thinking and wrong living that they blur, if they do not obliterate the very perceptions of good and evil."—MARY CLEMMER.

"In the nature of things, every sin against light draws blood on the spiritual retina."—JOSEPH COOK.

"When we in our own viciousness grow hard
(O, misery on't!) the wise gods seal our eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at us, while we strut
To our confusion."

SHAKESPEARE.

XIII.

JUDICIAL BLINDNESS.

THE loss of power to discern between the true and the false, the good and the evil, is ascribed in Scripture to a direct divine operation. "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear." * "The Lord hath poured upon you the spirit of deep sleep." † "He hath blinded their eyes, and he hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart." ‡ God sets his curse upon an unbelieving, impenitent heart. "He gives over a man who perseveres in resisting him, to blindness, so that he punishes himself, as it were, with his own hand." Nor is the blighting curse of unbelief confined to the future. It falls upon the soul now and here. Concerning those who pervert the light God has said: "Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see."

Laws are not self-executing. The power that

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* Rom. xi. 8. † Isa. xxix. 10. ‡ John xii. 40.

gives them execution is the power of whose will they are the expression. To this rule the laws of the moral world form no exception. Therefore, when we say that moral blindness is the natural consequence of resisting the truth, we must not overlook the fact that it is by the agency of God that natural results are produced. What we call "natural law," is simply our discovery of the orderly method according to which God works in nature. In accordance with this orderly method, existing in the very constitution of things, God manifests his sore displeasure against sin by carrying it to its proper results, causing those who treat His truth with indifference or contempt to lose the power of apprehending it. Alike in the physical and moral worlds it is a fixed principle that power rightly used increases, while power unused or abused, is lost. The eye that will not see cannot see. The ear that will not hear loses the power to hear. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath."

Of those upon whom has fallen a spirit of stupor it is said in Matt. xiii. 15, "Their eyes have they closed"; and in John xii. 40, "He hath blinded their eyes." Looked at from one aspect this moral blindness is their own act;

looked at from another aspect it is the act of God. Between the two views there is no antagonism. They describe different sides of the same moral condition. Those who wish not to be disturbed, dozingly close their inner eyes and keep them closed against heaven's sweet light which shines around them. They hide as it were their faces from the Anointed of God. Afraid lest they should be persuaded to repent they wilfully shut from their view all heavenly motives to a higher life. From this drowsy, slumbering state it is difficult to awake. Difficult, but, thank God! not impossible. While accountability lasts the slumberer may awake, ought to awake. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Even the blind are held responsible for their blindness. "Look, ye blind!" Tear off every bandage with which your spiritual eyes are blindfolded! "Anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see." Remain no longer in a state of willing ignorance.

The posture of the heart has everything to do with the reception of truth. The strength of faith is not in proportion to the clearness of our perceptions of truth, but in proportion to the eagerness with which the truth is embraced. There are those who because of some moral defect which obscures their vision, are "ever

learning but never able to come unto the knowledge of the truth." But, "as many as set themselves in order to eternal life, believe." Faith is a link in a long chain of events. It is the outgrowth of the antecedent life, and implies a condition of moral fitness for its exercise. Whether the truth will appear credible or incredible depends upon the state of the heart and life. "How can ye believe, which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?" On the other hand, there are those who are being fitted to know and accept the teaching of Christ as soon as it is presented: "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God or whether I speak from myself." "He that doeth truth cometh to the light." "It is the great error of thoughtless biographers," says John Ruskin, "to attribute to *accident* some new phase of character; whereas that phase of character was practically in existence already, and the accident only served to develop and bring it out." Alluding to his own case he says, "Turner's book might seem to be the point that determined the direction of my life. But the essential point to be accounted for is this, that I could understand Turner's book when I saw it." So in the case of those who come suddenly to "a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus," the

thing to be accounted for is that the truth should produce instantaneous conviction. Before the mental sensitive plate could, in an instant, take on an indelible impression, it must have passed through some secret process of preparation.

The things of the Spirit are spiritually discerned. In an outward fashion the Jews saw "all that the Lord did before their eyes"; and yet Moses said, "The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see." They saw and yet they saw not. Events passed before their eyes the inner meaning of which they did not discern. "The works of God," remarks Godet, "are in two aspects, the one external, the material fact; the other internal, the divine thought contained in the fact: and thus it comes about that when the eye of the soul is paralyzed one may see these works without seeing them." Just as some people are color-blind, others are morally blind. They are incapable of making clear moral distinctions. Wide awake regarding other matters, they are dull or confused whenever moral questions are touched.

Moral blindness is the result of a wrong moral condition. Sin distorts the vision of the soul. Prejudice bandages the eyes. Bad morals lead to false doctrine. A bad heart is a blind heart. Over the eye-balls of the unholy grows a thick,

horny scale which shuts God and his spiritual universe from sight. The diseased eye is pained by the light; and those whose sin is rebuked cannot "endure sound doctrine." There is no proof so clear and cogent that an evil heart cannot repel. When men love not the truth they find no difficulty in rejecting it. "None deny there is a God," says Lord Bacon, "but those for whom it maketh that there were no God." The wish is father to the faith. Never does the beatific vision come unsolicited, but always in answer to the soul's deepest longings. Never does the sinful heart catch a perfect reflection of the truth. "The pure in heart shall see God."

When men possess not "the love of the truth," God sends them strong delusion that they should believe a lie. Having shut their eyes to privilege and duty, God says, "Let their eyes be closed to danger, so that they shall say, Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Having put out the lamp in the light-house of conscience, they are allowed to wander from their course, and are wrecked upon the rocks. God blinds the heart that chooses error; he hardens the heart that chooses evil. In this there is nothing inconsistent with his justice or benevolence. Would it be right that sin and holiness, unbelief and faith, should be treated in the same way? Would it be benevolent to ordain that sin should prosper? Could

God be vindicated were he to dower a sinful life with the rightful inheritance of virtue? It is demanded alike by the interests of the universe and the interests of the individual that God carry out every human choice to its proper end.

Within every heart there is a continuous retribution going on, a retribution which turns upon the use which is being made of the light of life which shines upon the pathway of every pilgrim. "At every step of the way there is a faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the present life which God meets in the way of judgment." In the case of those who improve the light, there comes an increase of light in an increase of power to comprehend it; in the case of those who turn away from the light, the light that is in them becomes darkness, by the fading out of power to comprehend the light that shines around them.

Judgment is God's strange work, but it appears strange only because its true meaning is so often concealed. Judgment is sin brought to its final development,—sin with the mark of divine displeasure upon it. Judgment is the warning voice of love,—the flaming sword to keep men out of the way of sin and death.

XIV.

A COMMON SPIRITUAL DISEASE.

"God himself cannot procure good to the wicked."

—ANONYMOUS.

"But who would force the soul tilts with a straw
Against a champion cased in adamant."

WORDSWORTH.

"Though God be good and free be Heaven,
No force divine can love compel;
And, though the song of sins forgiven
May sound through lowest hell,

The sweet persuasion of His voice
Respects thy sanctity of will.
He giveth day; thou hast thy choice
To walk in darkness still."

WHITTIER.

"God never thrusts a man into hell; he thrusts himself in."

—SWEDENBORG.

XIV.

A COMMON SPIRITUAL DISEASE.

THE disease referred to is ossification or hardening of the heart. This has always been a widespread spiritual disorder, and prevails quite as extensively in the present day as in days gone by. Scripture holds up to view the case of Pharaoh as an aggravated type of this disease; but his case, although typical, is by no means exceptional. If, however, a correct diagnosis of so pronounced a case of moral induration can be obtained, data will be furnished for a better understanding of the essential nature of this fearful malady.

There are two distinct forms of this disease. The first of these is *selfishness.* What is indifference to the welfare of others but hard-heartedness? In common language a man who resists all appeals to his sympathy and benevolence is called a hard-hearted man. The upper side of his emotional nature resembles the flinty rock. The other prominent and prevailing form of this disease is *moral insensibility.* This was the peculiar aspect which it assumed in the case of

Pharaoh. That incorrigible monarch continued unyielding in the midst of the most signal manifestations of God's clemency and power. Like many gospel-hearers in the present day upon whom the most solemn truths make hardly any impression, he resisted divine influence as a stone resists a shower of rain.

A state of moral hardness is not the original or natural condition of the heart. Man has got sadly marred since leaving his maker's hands. God made man upright, man has made himself what he is; and glorying in his shame he boasts of being self-made.

In the transitions which have taken place in the formation of the solid crust of the earth, we have an emblem of the change which the soul of man has undergone in passing from its original state of purity into a state of sin. Geologists tell us that the primary rock structure is crystalline; and that it was once in a state of fusion. The coal fields were once immense forests. The limestone, which is composed of shell-fish and other aquatic animals, was once soft and pulpy. And so the most hardened criminal was once a pure-hearted, innocent boy; the abandoned profligate was once a guileless girl; the marble-hearted man who laughs at religious feeling as a childish weakness, once wept over his sins; the icy, obdurate heart from which the tender bloom of purity

has long since gone, was once gentle, chaste and loving, the home of holy thoughts, the fountain of holy, generous deeds.

Moral insensibility is reached gradually. It is a disease whose beginnings stretch far back into the past. So imperceptibly does it steal on that the victim is seldom apprehensive of danger. The subtle malady may manifest no alarming symptom, while it is working steadily to a fatal crisis. Jesus, on one occasion, when reasoning with the Pharisees, is said to have been "grieved at the hardening of their hearts." He saw the hardening process going on as his word was withstood; he knew the fatal result to which such a condition of heart would lead, and he was grieved. With the deepest sorrow he detected in the self-satisfied Pharisees the rapid development of a disease the existence of which within themselves they little suspected, and would have stoutly denied.

History affords no more impressive example of the gradual hardening of the heart than that of Nero. That infamous emperor once gave promise of noble things. In the beginning of his reign he showed marks of the greatest affability and humaneness. Nor is there any good reason to suspect that these qualities were simulated. We have the authority of his teacher Seneca for the pleasing incident that when he was under the

necessity of signing his name to a list of malefactors who were to be executed, he exclaimed, "Would to Heaven I could not write!" Afterwards, when the good angel was grieved away, no such scruples troubled him. There is the best of evidence for the general belief that he set fire to the city of Rome, in order that he might amuse himself with the wailings and lamentations of a distressed people, and by throwing the blame upon the Christians find an excuse for the fresh gratification of his satanic malignity. He even insulted High Heaven by offering thanksgiving to the gods, after cruelly murdering his wife and mother. This point of hardened wickedness was not reached at a single leap. Between the innocence of youth and the ripe depravity of manhood there lay a long process of moral deterioration. When principle snaps suddenly, it will generally be found that the work of decay has been going on at the center until nothing but the shell of a formal virtue is left.

By a like gradual descent did the Pharaoh of the Exodus—the weak and haughty Meneph-thah I.—reach a state of fixed opposition to God. Long had the spirit of rebellion been forming within him; and the dealing of God by forcing him to decision merely brought that inward condition to light. His moral hardness was the final result of a conflict between his will and the will

of God; a conflict in which the will of God was consciously and obstinately resisted. Every time Pharaoh disobeyed the mandate of Heaven in refusing to let the Hebrews go, he hardened his heart. Numerous and varied were the means used to overcome his indomitable pride, and bring him to repentance. The sudden death of his first-born was a voice of loudest warning. Then followed his own sickness when he was smitten with the plague of "boils with blains." As a special mark of mercy the Lord lengthened out the thread of his life; saying, "For this very purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be published abroad in all the earth."* God did not create him, or call him into being that he might make him "a monument of vengeance"; inciting him to evil by rousing him to resistance; then cutting him off from repentance, and hurrying him on to an inevitable doom. Longing to win him to repentance, God prolonged his forfeited life, manifesting his power *in him*, by revealing to him his alarming spiritual condition. Several times when divine power wrought inward conviction, Pharaoh exclaimed, "I have sinned this time, and I and my people are wicked." But although convicted he did not yield. The

* Rom. viii. 17, 18.

confession of his sinfulness was squeezed out by the force of trial, and did not flow freely from a softened, melted heart. When the pressure was withdrawn, the vow which had been made in the hour of trouble was forgotten. In spite of the clearest evidence of the absolute supremacy of the God of Israel, the will was stiffened against him. Means were employed, fitted and designed to secure the very opposite end to that which was produced. The free-will clay with which the divine Potter was at work upon his wheel, was intended for a vessel of honor, but the vessel was marred in his hand, and nothing could be done with it, but fashion it into a vessel of dishonor.

God's part in the hardening of the impenitent heart is something more than mere permission. He not only allows something to be done; he does something. There is an interplay of the human and the divine. Ten times is Pharaoh said to have hardened his own heart, and ten times is God said to have hardened it. In stifling conviction Pharaoh hardened his own heart; then followed judicial hardening, but not total abandonment. What else could God do with a stubborn heart than harden it? The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was no strange event, but was in perfect harmony with the general order of things in the moral world. By the outworking of the spiritual laws in constant operation any heart is

hardened when God's message is rejected. Upon every heart that continues stout against the Most High, the divine curse alights. Just as every appeal made by a loving mother to an erring child has, if resisted, the effect of hardening the heart ; so every appeal made by God to the human conscience when resisted hardens the heart, making it insensible alike to God's mercy and to its own danger.

Man may thus get evil out of good, as on the other hand he may get good out of evil. From the same soil springs the poisonous and the food-bearing plants ; the sun that hardens clay, melts wax ; the wind that wafts one ship into harbor, dashes another upon the rocks ; the gospel which is salvation to one is condemnation to another— "the savor of life unto life, or the savor of death unto death."

God hardens whom he will, and he wills to harden the persistently impenitent. The contrite heart he wills to soften. Along the undeviating line of spiritual law the divine will is carried out in bringing upon the impenitent a constant and constantly increasing current of penalty ; but alongside of that current of penalty flows the mightier current of divine mercy, in which it is swallowed up and lost whenever true repentance for sin takes place. So that when God, claiming absolute sovereign rights, says,

"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," be it remembered that in the exercise of his sovereign rights he wills to have mercy upon the penitent. To the question, Unto whom does God will to show mercy? this is the answer: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him." "As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness." Had the haughty Egyptian king bowed in penitence before the scepter of Jehovah, he would not only have obtained forgiveness, but the hand that smote him would have been outstretched to bless him; his example, instead of being held up as a beacon of warning, would have been handed down as an inspiration; his life, which set in the darkness of dishonor, would have been encircled with a halo of unfading glory; and through him the name of God would have been proclaimed in all the earth—not by overwhelming judgment, but by forgiving mercy.

"The heart of a king, *in the hand of Jehovah*, is as rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will," * controlling and utilizing it, as the Eastern husbandman, by means of artificial irrigation, con-

* Prov. xxi. 1. Suggested rendering.

trols and utilizes the waters of the river, sending them at will along the furrows of his fields. Any heart which was before a source of misery and ruin becomes when put into God's hand a source of blessing, spreading verdure and beauty over the moral wastes of life through which it flows; but because of the wide-spread influence of royalty, a king's heart, in God's hand, becomes like a majestic river which waters an entire continent. Such a heart that of Pharaoh's might have been, —but alas! alas!

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XV.

"PAST FEELING."

"That is a hard heart indeed that trembles not at the name of a hard heart."—ST. BERNARD.

"It is one thing to see your way, another to cut it."—GEORGE ELIOT.

"God give him grace to groan."

SHAKESPEARE.

"In the lowest depths a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide."

MILTON.

XV.

"PAST FEELING." *

THERE can be no sadder sight under the skies than a soul that is "past feeling," unless it be a soul incapable of feeling; but a soul incapable of feeling would be a soul destitute of the essential qualities of soul—a thing, and not a being. John Stuart Mill defines personality as "the permanent possibility of feeling." Sensibility is a quality of soul, as weight and size are qualities of matter. To take away the possibility of feeling, the soul—the feeling nature—must be destroyed. When therefore the pathological figure of bodily insensibility to pain or pleasure is taken to describe mental or moral states the comparison must not be carried too far. Strictly speaking the body is incapable of feeling of any kind, and is but the medium through which the soul feels. When the soul departs from the body, the body is not only past feeling, but past the possibility of feeling. So long as soul or personality remains, there remains "the permanent possibility

* Eph. iv. 19.

of feeling." Even when a man in his downward progress reaches that woeful state of moral insensibility described as "past feeling," he does not sink out of himself into a state of moral nonentity. Although past feeling he is not past the possibility of feeling.

One who is smitten with a great sorrow may never smile again. He may sit in perpetual gloom, morbidly hugging his grief, refusing to be comforted. As a matter of fact and experience he is past joy; but is he past the possibility of joy? Is he not deemed guilty for holding himself down to his sorrow, and away from the sunshine that seeks an entrance into his heart?

A human spirit may be past redemption, while not past the possibility of redemption. That any one does not repent is no evidence that he cannot repent; that he will not reform is no proof that he cannot reform; that he lacks the will to serve God is no evidence that he lacks the power.

The expression "past feeling" refers exclusively to present moral condition. Capability of feeling is not burned out, or there could be no pain or remorse on account of sin, and hence no punishment for sin. All pure, heavenly feeling, all sensitiveness of moral touch is gone; all interest in spiritual things is gone. Conscience once tender has become seared as with a hot iron; the

heart of flesh has become a heart of stone. But all feeling is by no means extinguished. The lower feelings may be strong and vigorous while the higher feelings are withered and dead, just as a tree may be alive at the root and rotten at the top. The baser feelings may glow as a furnace while the nobler feelings are burned to a cinder.

Moral obduration even in the case of demons does not render feeling impossible. "The demons believe and shudder." Dark thoughts of the One God whose authority they have contemned throw their guilty hearts into violent commotion as the sea is lashed into fury by the storm. They are not past foreboding and remorse, although they may be past all desire to return to divine allegiance. An old legend represents, on the one hand, the arrival before the throne of God of the penitent souls whom his pity admits into heaven, and on the other Satan, who says, "These souls have offended against thee a thousand times; I, only once." "Hast thou ever asked forgiveness?" replies the Eternal.

An inquisitive little boy asked his mother, "If the Devil repented would God forgive him?" The answer of the embarrassed mother is not reported. But why should any one hesitate to say that God would forgive even the supreme rebel of the universe if he repented? At a meet-

ing where all sorts and conditions of sinners were being prayed for an old Scotch woman exclaimed with a sudden outburst of holy pity: "The Deil, the poor Deil! naebody prays for the Deil!" Why not pray for him? Is the cry of sympathy to be stilled in the presence of the greatest need? We may not pray that God would forgive the Devil as he is, but surely we have every warrant to pray that he become other than he is that God may forgive him? But, O, the pity of it! fallen angels and fallen men may come into a state where all desire for restoration has passed away. And what can prayers of saints or tears of God avail when this state of settled alienation has been reached?

Into this sad state in which all feeling of desire for better things has been left behind, and the proper choice of the will has been reversed, how many insensibly glide! Moral paralysis overtakes them with no sharp and sudden stroke. There is a benumbing of the spiritual faculties at the extremities, and steadily and stealthily the disease creeps inward to the vital parts, until all feeling is gone. Of the deadening effect of wrong-doing the Poet Burns says:—

"I waive the quantum of the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But oh, it hardens all within,
And petrifies the feeling."

The degree of ease with which sin is committed indicates the degree of moral obduracy which has been reached. Those who are past feeling "work all uncleanness with greediness." They hunger and thirst after sin. It is their meat and their drink to do evil. No "compunctious visitings of nature" trouble them. The protest of conscience grows ever feebler. An easy victory is won over every uprising thought which stands as a good angel between them and the commission of wrong. As sinful habit grows stronger remorse decreases.

This explains why so many gospel hearers remain unmoved while listening to truths that once made them tremble and weep. They have become conscience-proof. Their moral natures are so thickly padded with indifference that the lustiest blows fall unfelt. They are not "gospel hardened," but hardened against the Gospel. Encased in worldliness, encrusted by formalism, they are impervious to all divine appeals. Beneath their thick, tough moral epidermis the sharpest argument fails to penetrate. The Gospel does not get a chance with them. They ward it off. They "hold the truth in unrighteousness," that is, they detain the truth—keep it at arm's length—keep it outside their thoughts—that they may continue in unrighteousness. Knowing that the truth is a foe to sin, knowing

that when the truth enters the heart sin departs, they do not allow it to come within the threshhold of their spiritual habitation. They slam in the face of truth the door of their spiritual home, afraid least she enter and disturb with her accusing voice the false security that reigns within.

Being a wrong moral condition this deadness of feeling is preventable. It ought to be watched against, fought against. "If ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Everything that blunts the finer feelings of the heart and dulls the perceptions of good and evil ought to be carefully avoided. And when the discovery is made that sin's opiates are lulling the soul into a deadly stupor, the rudest shocks should be applied, if need be, to bring back moral consciousness. The case may be desperate, but it is not hopeless. Strenuous effort will bring back feeling when the soul is "past feeling." Within the most torpid nature latent powers are slumbering; somewhere in the most callous heart there is a tender spot; in the strongest suit of spiritual mail there is a vulnerable point. Fountains of the deepest feeling lie in the most depraved hearts, ready to be unsealed by a kind word or deed. Plunged in the laver of regeneration the moral leper who was dry and lifeless as parchment comes forth with his flesh restored

"like unto the flesh of a little child." The heart that had moved downward "past feeling," regains

> "A sensibility to sin
> A pain to feel it near."

There is a sense in which "guilt is a spiritual Rubicon." It cuts the soul off from innocence; but it does not cut it off from mercy, or from the hope of a better life. The goodness of God has power to lead the guiltiest to repentance. As the hardest stone may be pulverized, as flint by chemical agencies may be reduced to pulp, so the mercy of God can change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. During winter it may seem as if the sun never would be able to penetrate beneath the surface of the frost-bound earth; but as he draws closer to the earth in summer the warmth of his rays goes down to the roots of the trees, and thrills them with life. Thus does the Gospel penetrate to the very center of the soul, exciting the most dormant susceptibilities into activity. The very thing which the Gospel as a curative power accomplishes for man is to pour new life and energy into his diseased and enfeebled moral nature, quickening every faculty; awakening the conscience, arousing into action the limp and nerveless will, and inspiring the heart with new and powerful motives.

A ship is cruising in polar seas. Signs are given that winter is approaching. Heroic efforts are made to reach the open waters; but such is the disabled condition of the ship, and the enfeebled condition of the crew, that before the weather-beaten craft can thread its way through the floating icebergs, the ice surrounds it, and holds it in its relentless grip. To those discomfited sailors it might seem as if the cruel grasp of the ice would never relax. But summer returns apace, and opens a pathway of hope for that ice-bound ship. The crew gain "heart of grace;" new life kindles the eye, and stirs the blood; new purposes are formed, lethargy and despondency are shaken off, and vigorous and successful efforts made to escape from the dominion of the Ice King.

Must we, can we, believe that to those who have sailed away from God and got fixed in the polar sea of sinful habit there comes no summer of hope? that those who have gone into unholy courses have nothing to look forward to save an unbroken winter of despair? Is the sunshine of divine pity not sufficiently warm to thaw before the habit-bound soul a path to righteousness and peace? Is the breath of the divine Spirit not sufficiently powerful to stimulate to resolute action the most dormant nature, and lead it to will and to accomplish deliverance from the

dominion of evil? Is there no hope in God for helpless men? There must be; there *is!* "The great God casteth away no man;" the Merciful Father keeps open before every man a door of deliverance, and if there linger within any heart the faintest feeling of homesickness, it is always possible to push out from the self-imposed exile of a sinful life, and by a resolute endeavor reach at length the sun-lit lands of purity that now seem to lie so far away.

XVI.

BARTERING THE BIRTHRIGHT.

"Well doth Agathon say, 'Of this alone is even God deprived —the power of making that which is past never to have been.'"

—ARISTOTLE.

"Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
Which we ascribe to Heaven."

SHAKESPEARE.

"Late repentance is seldom true, but true repentance is never too late."—JAY.

"The good he scorned
Stalked off reluctant like an ill-used ghost
Not to return; or if it did, in visits
Like those of angels, short and far between."

BLAIR

"Could he with reason murmur at his case,
Himself sole author of his own disgrace?"

COWPER.

XVI.

BARTERING THE BIRTHRIGHT.

SALVATION is man's birthright; a birthright that comes to him not on the ground of merit, but solely on the ground of his connection with Christ. His title to the free, full, rich life, which is designated in Scripture "eternal life," is held in the name of Christ; for only through Christ is such a life attainable. If this heavenly birthright, purchased at a cost that can never be computed, be lightly esteemed and madly thrown away—what then? Is the loss irreparable? Can the lost paradise never be regained? Is the forsaken home forever shut upon the exile? Does the cry of agony which pierces the heavens bring no response? Does God stand by unmoved by the tears and prayers of his child, having in his heart no place for pity and pardon? Is repentance ever unavailing? Is it ever too late to mend? Will the Lord ever scorn to accept the remnants of a wasted life? Not so have we learned God.

There is one instance where it is thought that

repentance came too late; an instance which many consider to be held up as a danger-flag, warning of the possibility of reaching a point where repentance proves of no avail; namely, the instance where it is said concerning Esau, "Ye know that even when he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears." *

Esau was a rough, willful child of nature; not lacking in brave and generous qualities, yet dominated by lower desires and impulses. Upon the canvas of the Scriptures he stands out under the description of "a fornicator and profane person." A sensual man, evidently, prepared to sacrifice to present indulgence the sacred prerogatives which were his birthright as the eldest born. To him belonged by right of primogeniture a double portion of the patrimonial inheritance; the position of patriarchal head, priest, and ruler of the family. All this he bartered for the momentary gratification of appetite. "*Afterward* he desired to inherit the blessing." The recoil of sated desire had come. Conscience was stung with remorse. His dull, sense-bound eyes saw clear for once, and he became convinced of his folly and sin; or perhaps convinced

* Heb. xii. 17.

more of his folly than of his sin. Loss of his inheritance seems to have given him more grief than loss of manhood. He saw what a fool he had been in allowing himself to be duped by his sleek, artful brother. In selling his precious birthright for a miserable mess of pottage he had made a poor bargain. But what was done in a moment of weakness could not afterwards be undone. The birthright had been given to another, and could not be recalled. "He found no place for repentance, although he sought it bitterly with tears." His sorrow over his loss was deep and pungent. We read in Genesis that "he cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, and said, Bless me, even me also, O my father." He had found a place for repentance *in himself*, but could find no place for repentance *in his father*. All his tears and entreaties could not induce his father to change his mind, and transfer the blessing to him, the rightful heir. Although unrighteously supplanted by his crafty and perfidious brother, the blessing once given could not be revoked; the dying will and testament could not be broken. The answer which Esau got to his importunate entreaties was one that shut off all hope. "I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed."

Our sympathies are with Esau. We instinctively pity him, even when we blame him. He

had a human father to deal with, one who had but a single blessing to dispense, one who was immovable, one who acted under mistaken fidelity to a vow which would have been honored more in the breach than in the observance. No supplicating child is treated thus by the Heavenly Father. For every one of his prodigal children he has a blessing. His is a heart of love, not of iron. No tearful entreaty is needed to wring a reluctant favor from his hand. He is ever ready to give and to forgive; ever on the giving and forgiving side. To give is his delight; to forgive his special delight. Within his loving breast the faintest cry of the penitent finds a responsive echo, and to the sorrowing, suppliant child the bartered birthright is instantly restored.

With some the case of Judas presents still stronger proof than that of Esau in favor of the doctrine that repentance may come too late. Let us see. Disappointed because of the blighting of his inherited Messianic hopes, which at the first the prophet of Nazareth seemed to give promise of fulfilling; growing in antipathy towards the spiritual ideas of Christ's kingdom, Judas nursed within his breast a spirit of hate that urged him on to the darkest deed the world has witnessed. Refusing to accept the noble destiny for which he had been endowed, and to

which he had been called, the circumstances which would have led him to blessedness hurried him to ruin. His was too deep and earnest a nature to find any sweetness in revenge. When he saw what he had done he "rued" his fiendish act, and stood before the bar of his own conscience, self-judged, and self-condemned. The burning fire of remorse was instantly kindled. Stung to anguish unbearable he rushed into the Temple, and cast down the blood-money at the feet of the men whose tool he had been, exclaiming, "I have sinned, in that I betrayed innocent blood"; then hastening to make the only atonement to a guilty, awakened conscience that now seemed possible, he went and hanged himself. Unhappy Judas! Forgive himself he could not. Divine forgiveness he dared not ask. He felt that a sin so foul even divine mercy could not wash away. Perhaps that was the reason why he confessed to those iron-hearted creatures and not to God. If so, grievously did his despair wrong the Heavenly Father, who has said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Altogether bad the betrayer was not. One to whom wrong-doing brought such bitter grief must have had in him something good. Many sell the Master for the world's thirty pieces of silver without experiencing a single pang of agony. And if remorse so deep and pungent touches our human pity,

who shall dare to say that it failed to touch the pity of the Infinite Heart?

Repentance secures pardon, restores the sinner to the sunshine of the Father's smile, but it does not wipe out as with a sponge all the natural consequences of evil doing. No regrets can obliterate the effects of sin. Every broken thread in the web of character leaves a flaw. Repentance cannot stop the flames when once the fire has been kindled. The injury inflicted upon others no after sorrow can repair; the squandered fortune the remaining years of life may be unable to redeem. In a moment the work of a lifetime may be undone. By one act of wickedness an unblemished reputation may suffer a blot which no future consistent living can efface; by one heedless sin all the benefits of past obedience may be cut off. So delicate a thing is character, so easily is it injured that "a good name got by many actions may be lost by one," and once lost it is seldom regained. "The descent of Avernus," says Virgil, "is easy; the gate of Pluto stands open night and day, but to retrace one's steps, and return to the upper air,—that is the toil, that is the difficulty." In the retrospect of every life there is much that is irretrievable, much that might have been, that never more may be.

"Look carefully lest there be any man that

falleth short of the grace of God." Such is the lesson, such the warning given in view of Esau's fall. Consider how his one act of folly and weakness brought vain regret, and take heed lest thou also become the object of thine own scorn and contempt. Watch diligently for the first outcroppings of the poisonous root of fleshly desire. Beware of the excessive indulgence of appetite, for that way ruin lies. Exercise prudent self-control, rigorous self-denial. Sell not manhood for gold. Sacrifice not the highest interests to the lowest. Make character, not pleasure, the end of life. Grapple boldly with uprising desire, planting the foot of resolute will upon the neck of every rebellious passion, "resisting unto blood, striving against sin."

> "The hardening of the heart that brings
> Irreverence for the dreams of youth,
> All thoughts of ill,—all evil deeds
> That have their root in thoughts of ill
> Whatever hinders or impedes
> The action of the nobler will,—
> All these must first be trampled down
> Beneath our feet, if we would gain
> In the bright field of fair renown
> The right of eminent domain."

Before the final triumph of the spirit over the flesh there comes in every life the battle of Armageddon. Not amid the discordant babblements of the world, but in the solitudes of the

soul is the battle fought out. In the supreme struggle between his higher and lower nature every man is driven into the wilderness. There he enters the contest which is to decide whether henceforth he shall be a freeman or a slave. Self-mastery is the price of heroic struggle. The crown of life, life true and eternal, is the reward of him that overcometh. With this crown no coward's head is adorned. It must be won before it can be worn.

In the conflict of the Spirit with the flesh evil has to be fought not only when it comes as a roaring lion, but also when it approaches stealthily like an impalpable miasma, poisoning the soul-blood, and enervating the moral constitution. Sometimes there comes over the soul a moral inertia which is a harder foe to overcome than the most turbulent passion. Decay of will, decay of moral virility—the penalty of indulgence and inaction—brings on a condition of passive despair from which there is no sharp and sudden rebound. Habitual surrendering to evil gradually weakens the strength of will, until that state of extreme impotence is reached when resolutions are still-born, and the soul, a discrowned king, sits amid the ruin of his former greatness, issuing empty mandates.

With constantly increasing indisposition to action, with the certainty that every awakened

impulse if not carried out will leave the soul weaker than before; that the power of self-action still remaining if not put into exercise will decline yet more and more—how momentous is the present choice! And besides the danger arising from the gradual loss and final collapse of spiritual power, there is the additional danger of the closing in of the prison walls of the earth-life, until no place is left for moral reform. A place for repentance, wide and roomy, is afforded now and here, which is not afforded then and yonder. A place for repentance is found at the mercy-seat which is not found at the judgment-seat. When the present day of grace has been sinned away, tears of blood will not recover the birthright which has been lost. It will then be forever beyond the grasp of those who have bartered it away for the world's pelf and pleasure. With a painful sense of self-inflicted loss, the soul, unable to pluck out the memory of the past, will be forced "to sit amid deep ashes of the vanished years," haunted by the bitter reflection that all might have been otherwise. No need will there be for any arbitrary punishment inflicted from without. The worm that dieth not, the undying worm of an accusing conscience, will gnaw at the vitals of the Spirit. The poet sings that "Sorrow's crown of sorrow is in remembering happier things,"

but is not the acme of sorrow rather remembering the glorious possibilities that have been swept away into the irrevocable past? Upon the ear of the spirit there can fall no sound more doleful than the closing of the golden gates of hope that open inward, but do not open outward. There are dead hopes for which there is no resurrection. There is a repentance which flies with weary wing over wide wastes of water without finding a blessed ark of rest. Like a foot-sore and fainting traveler who has been turned away from an inn in which there was no room for him, the Soul that has bartered away the sacred birthright of a redeemed manhood, may wander on in "the blackness of darkness," finding that doors of opportunity which once stood open wide are now forever closed. "When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door saying, 'Lord, open to us;' he shall answer and say unto you, I know ye not whence ye are."

XVII.

DEATH A LOSS.

"Many things appear and are irretrievable to us, but there is nothing irretrievable with God."—THOS. ERSKINE.

"Nothing is too late
Till the tired heart shall cease to palpitate."
LONGFELLOW (*Translation*).

"Heaven delights
To pardon erring man: sweet mercy seems
Its darling attribute, which limits justice."
DRYDEN.

"Courage, my friend Battus; to-morrow will perhaps be more favorable; while there is life there is hope; the dead only are without hope."—THEOCRITUS.

"As long as life its term extends
Hope's blest dominion never ends:
For while the lamp holds on to burn
The greatest sinner may return."
SCOTCH PARAPHRASE.

XVII.

DEATH A LOSS.

THE surprises of saving grace are never surprises of divine paucity, but are always surprises of divine plenitude. In every age God has done exceeding abundantly above all that any finite mind has been able to ask or think. Even in the far off days before the flood, the Eternal Spirit, the Spirit-of-the-Ages, was already brooding over human hearts. Speaking to the antediluvians through Noah, Jehovah said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh, and his days shall be an hundred and twenty years."* That is, My Spirit, *which is now striving*, shall not always strive with man. The moral influence of the Spirit's operations is indicated in the word *strive*, the universal sweep of his operations in the generic term *man*. As a father strives with an ungodly son, plying him with reasons and motives to induce him to stop his mad career of sin and shame, so does the

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* Gen. vi. 3.

divine Spirit suasively strive with man. The Spirit is no impersonal force or substance, but a personal agent, with a heart of infinite love, capable of being grieved, and always grieved when his tender pleadings are resisted. Although often moving outside and above the lower laws of which we are cognizant, he always treats man in harmony with his nature, and appeals to him as an intelligent being. His inner contact is the contact of spirit with spirit. His touch is not the touch of irresistible power, but of loving persuasion. He enters the soul by every avenue, seeking to woo it from sin, and win it to God. Not only through the monitions of conscience, the common teachings of nature, and the ministries of providence, but through the sacrifice of Abel, through the saintly life of Enoch, who in these evil days walked with God, through the burning words of Noah, "the herald of righteousness," through the building of the ark, which was a token of Noah's faith in the coming judgments, divinely threatened, did the Spirit of God strive with the antediluvians. Redeeming influences beset them behind and before. At every point of progress in their downward march to the prison of the Universe, they were interrupted by pitying, pleading love. In every upward struggle the Holy Spirit of God stood ready to help them.

It was, however, plainly intimated that a time

was fast approaching when the holiness-inspiring, sin-destroying influences by which they were encircled would be withdrawn; or rather, a time was coming when they would pass beyond the reach of these gracious influences. "My Spirit *shall not always* strive with man." Awful threat! the force of which we dare not weaken. Are we then to infer that somewhere this side of the grave there is a point at which the Spirit gives up striving? If so, there must be a time when salvation is impossible, for apart from the Spirit's help no soul can attain unto salvation. This frightful doctrine, which many, in spite of the protests of the heart, have felt themselves driven to accept, has been voiced in the well-known hymn of Dr. J. A. Alexander, which has been well styled "The dirge of a lost soul."

"There is a line by us unseen,
That crosses every path,
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and his wrath.

Oh! where is this mysterious bourne,
By which our path is crossed;
Beyond which God himself has sworn
That he who goes is lost?

How far may we go on in sin?
How long will God forbear?
When does hope end, and where begin
The confines of despair?"

It is assumed that the boundary line between probation and retribution lies on the hither, and not on the thither side of the tomb; that hope ends before the close of life; that the soul enters "the confines of despair" before reaching the limit of its earthly existence. Is this doctrine of doom according to truth? Is it not "another gospel" than the sweet evangel of mercy which forms the burden of the Bible, and which proclaims that "to him that is joined to all the living there is hope"? Let a man be never so bad, is there not hope while there is life, that he will amend? Is there not hope that a change may be wrought in him by the Spirit of God? Extraordinary cases do indeed occur in which life seems to be protracted beyond the period of moral agency; but these are cases of living death, cases in which reason is unseated, or cases in which the avenues leading to the soul, from the earthward side, are closed up. So long as man can think God reasons with him; so long as he retains his moral agency, the words, "*Now* is the day of salvation," can never be of doubtful application.

A cloud of difficulty is at once lifted from our subject when it is noted *why* the Spirit of God would not always strive with man. Jehovah said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man FOR that he also is flesh, and his days shall be

an hundred and twenty years." The idea is not that there was to be a time this side eternity when the antediluvians would be given up by the Spirit of God, but that being mortal a time would come when the hand of death would sever their connection with the present source of saving help. For while it is true that the operations of divine grace have a moral rather than a time limit, yet there are certain things limited to time, and among these are the present gracious influences of the divine Spirit. Those who do not yield up their lives to the guiding and moulding influences of God's Spirit enter upon their future state of existence under great disadvantages: those who have been Spirit-led and governed begin the future life under the most favorable auspices. What death will bring to any one is determined by what life has been. There are no broken links in the chain of existence. "Death is no juggler to transmute qualities by a touch." Death is merely an incident, a transition, a change of place, not a change of self-hood. Death makes no gap in any life. It is the birth-pang into a higher or lower state of existence. All the experiences of the present are carried forward into the future; the harvest of character here ripened is there gathered in, and stored up. Nothing is lost. As life is begun here, it is continued there. "To be con-

tinued in the next," is written at the close of the last chapter of every human life. When life has been an ascent death will be an ascent; when life has been a descent death will be a descent; when it has been gain to live it will be gain to die; when life has been a loss, death must be a loss. Those who have lived in the spirit, and have by a divine alchemy brought heavenly gain out of earthly loss, suffer no loss by death, but continue to keep "on the gain," advancing from glory to glory; but those who have lived in the flesh, those whose apparent gains have brought them real loss, those who in order to gain the world have thrown away manhood, divine communion, heavenly hope, holy character—in a word *soul*, end the present life and begin the future life in a state of spiritual bankruptcy and ruin. Not the least item in their loss is the loss of spiritual privilege. It is a law of the spiritual kingdom that non-use or abuse of privilege leads to its withdrawal, and that resistance of remedial influence is followed by dispossession. "From him that hath not shall be taken away that which he hath." And while we must admit the continued possibility of moral change so long as the moral nature of man remains intact, yet by the abuse of privilege or power man may put himself in conditions unfavorable to moral change, conditions which leave a very slender probability of

any upward moral movement ever taking place. At the touch of death opportunities vanish which never return; and even if new opportunities are afterwards given, they recur in a constantly diminishing measure. The Roman king, who refused to purchase the Sibylline leaves after the first and second offers, paid at last for the remaining three the price asked for the original nine; three of the precious leaves having been destroyed upon each refusal. And so by every refusal of divine mercy something is lost; by continued refusal all is lost. The slighted favor of to-day is never carried into to-morrow. God still warns those who are repulsing his efforts for their redemption, saying unto them, "My spirit shall not always strive with man."

The text under consideration has an added value as supplying a side light by which we are helped to an understanding of the obscure text in the first epistle of St. Peter, where Christ is represented as preaching "in the spirit" (i. e. in his own essential, spiritual nature, in which he was quickened from the dead,) "to spirits in prison." * Whether the preaching of Christ took place during his pre-incarnate, or during his post-incarnate state; whether it was addressed to men on earth who are now spirits in prison, or to spir-

* 1 Peter iii. 18–21.

its in prison who were once men on earth, the point to be noted in the present connection is, that in the early morning hour of history before the Flood, an efflux of spiritual power was enjoyed. The first droppings of the heavenly rain, which at Pentecost was outpoured in a copious shower, then fell to earth; the first link of the great chain of divine Spirit-force by which the ages are bound together in one continuous dispensation of redemption, then came into view. God was at work on man. With the spirits in prison, when as yet they were men on earth, the Spirit of God strove, through a long period of deferred judgment. A wondrous display of mercy preceded the fearful doom by which they were finally overtaken.

From the Old Testament narrative some important facts may be gathered relating to the world-life of the imprisoned spirits to whom Christ preached. The picture given of their moral condition is a dark one. In words at once graphic and suggestive we are told that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The disease was both widespread and deep; the fountain of life was poisoned, the heart was corrupt to the very core, moral degeneration was well nigh universal. Calls to repentance were

unheeded, the day of gracious opportunity was sinned away. "While the ark was preparing" the long-suffering of God waited upon that evil generation. The hundred and twenty years of respite which had been granted to see if they would repent and turn to God, at length expired. Under a Messianic ministry they continued disobedient, unpersuadable. "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away,"—away from the spiritual privileges which they had so long neglected,—away from the close and tender touch of the loving Spirit whose sweet influences they had so long rejected. Their end was destruction because they minded earthly things, and slighted the things of the Spirit.

All questions of historic value aside, the Noachic deluge forms a striking object-lesson, the ethical import of which lies upon the surface. "It is," as Oehler has so well put it, "*the first judgment in the world* executed by the holy God, who will no longer permit his Spirit to be profaned by man's sin." The Puritan Howe describes Jehovah as thus addressing the unhappy souls who had so stoutly withstood the strivings of his Spirit: "Because thou hast so great a mind to gain the day, and to deliver thyself from

under the power of my grace, get that unhappy victory, and perish by it." Nay, Puritan Father! rather would Jehovah say: "Keep yourselves under the power of my grace: and let my Spirit win the victory over your obstinate hearts, that ye perish not."

Out of the darkness of judgment, divine solicitude shines forth with ever increasing brightness, along the whole line of that special movement of God manward, of which the Bible is the record. Other religions represent man as seeking God; the religion of the Bible alone represents God as seeking man. So long as the smallest ember of spiritual power lies smoldering beneath the ashes of a ruined life, there is no abatement of the efforts of God to save the lost. When his efforts fail, he mourns with a sorrow of heart which cannot be measured. The difference it makes to him whether the lost remain lost, or are at last reclaimed, none may ever know. Into his joy, when the end of his long and loving search has been attained, earth may refuse to enter; but as he returns from the wilderness leading the wanderer home, Heaven's bells peal their loudest,

> "And the angels echo around the throne,
> Rejoice, for the Lord brings back his own."

XVIII.

THE FINALITY OF THE PRESENT.

"The curtains of yesterday drop down; the curtains of to-morrow roll up; but yesterday and to-morrow both are."—CARLYLE.

"Oh, but to tarry once more
At the point where two roads met,
And choose as we chose not then,—
Made wise by a life's regret!"

ANONYMOUS.

"Urge them while their souls
Are capable of this ambition;
Lest, zeal now melted by the windy breath
Of soft petitions, pity and remorse
Cool and congeal again to what it was."

SHAKESPEARE.

XVIII.

THE FINALITY OF THE PRESENT.

In cautious, measured words Bishop Butler asserts that "that which makes the question concerning the future life of so great importance to us, is our capacity of happiness or misery; and that which makes the consideration of it to be of so great importance to us is the supposition of our happiness hereafter depending upon our actions here."* The presence in man of the moral instinct or conviction that the present is the seed-time of which eternity is the harvest, that upon the life that now is hinges the life that is to come, none will deny. And unquestionably the general tenor of Scripture teaching produces upon the popular mind the impression that Salvation is the paramount affair of this world; that in some special sense the quality of moral finality attaches to the present state of existence. "The obvious practical lesson and purpose of Scripture upon this question," says Dr. Chalmers, "is to cut

* *Analogy of Religion*, Chap. II.

off every pretext of postponing the care of eternity from this world, and to press home upon every unsophisticated reader of his Bible the dread alternative of Now, or Never."

In the much-quoted text, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" * the doctrine of the finality of the present is indeed taught, but it is taught inferentially, and not, as might at first be supposed, by direct and positive statement. The immediate design of this text is to present a motive to Christian activity. In the preceding verse the Apostle says, "We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." "We pray you that you frustrate not the purpose for which the forgiving grace of God has been bestowed; but that you constantly strive to take hold of that for which God has taken hold of you." What is the purpose for which divine grace is given? Is it not this,—that it may be conveyed to others? All personal experiences of inward delight are means rather than ends. What is taken in should be given out; what has been inpoured should be outpoured. Those that come unto Christ and drink should become fountains of living water; the inflow of living water into their hearts is to

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

be followed by an outflow into other hearts. Between the ocean fullness of God and the world's emptiness the believing soul forms a connecting pipe. Salvation comes to the world from God, but it comes from God through his people. It is the divine purpose and plan that "by the church might be made known the manifold wisdom of God."

While urging those who had received the grace of God not to shut it up in their own bosom but to let it stream out upon others, the Apostle enforces his exhortation with the argument, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." The present is a favorable time, a time of grace, a time of acceptance. There is no need to wait in doubt, restraining prayer. God's good time, God's set time, is *now*. All the motives that could lead him to answer prayer for others to-morrow are equally powerful to-day. Unto his Anointed he said of old, "At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee;" to-day he says unto all his praying people, "Behold, *now* is the acceptable time."

Another link is added to the chain of argument; Now, this very day, *is the day of salvation*, the day in which God is putting forth his uttermost of saving power; therefore let those who have received his grace stir up their strength, and work together with him in the redemption of

humanity. God is ready to bestow redeeming power upon men, and he seeks to use his people in its distribution. The reason why the water of life often fails to reach thirsty, perishing souls, is because the appointed channels of communication are choked up. The work of God lingers because the instruments upon which he depends are not prepared for use. God is urgent, but his people are supine; God is in haste, but his people lag. Every loiterer he rebukes; every willing-footed messenger he sends forth crowned with blessing, upon errands of love; power for service he abundantly bestows; work done he accepts and rewards; divine might he yokes with human weakness; divine gains he puts to the credit of the human agent. In this pledged co-operation of the divine with the human, in this open assurance of being heard and helped, is found one of the strongest motives to instant and hearty consecration to the work of saving men. That now is the day of the Lord's power, should constrain his people to be free-will offerings, and render to him willing-handed, willing-hearted service. That "now is the day of salvation" should incite those with whom the Lord is working, to put forth their strongest efforts to push towards fulfillment the purpose of redemption upon which the heart of God is set. Belief in the present possibility of salvation furnishes the needed ful-

crum upon which to rest the lever of Christian effort. The age now running swiftly to its close affords possibilities of fruitful Christian service that no preceding age ever offered. It is now "the fullness of the times." The river of salvation is at full flood. Never could life be made to tell for the Kingdom of God so much as now. Never was the responsibility of living so great as now.

As the initial sphere of spiritual development, the present life can hardly be sufficiently magnified. Not what it fits us for, but what it *is* constitutes its highest element of worth. Life does not simply afford *a* chance of being saved; it is one continuous opportunity, one perpetual *now*. In every life, "Now is the favorably accepted time; Now is the day of Salvation." During the continuance of the present time-period a season of amnesty is enjoyed; doors of special privilege stand open; favors are offered which are only for to-day; golden opportunities are available which when gone out of life will never return; alluring possibilities present themselves which pass away for ever at the setting of life's sun. Not the dread of the future, but the glorious opportunity of the present is made the chief incentive to spiritual activity. Repent, not because the Kingdom of Hell is at hand, but because the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Repent—not that you may escape the doom of perdition, but that you may enter into the kingdom,—the kingdom of righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,—the kingdom of royal, Christlike souls. And let repentance be speedy, because only for a limited time is the present respite granted, only for a limited time are the present immunities given—only until the close of life's brief day are the present opportunities held out. The Intercessor of man does not pray that the doom pronounced over the barren tree may not descend, but that it be delayed. "Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it." This final effort of divine long-suffering love to redeem life from spiritual barrenness fills up the decisive period of trial to which the whole future is linked. "If it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not thou shalt cut it down."

To the question, "Wherefore do the wicked live?" this then is the answer; "They live that they may have time to repent, time to reform, time to ripen." If the mercy now offered is missed, it may never be won back. Says St. Ambrose, "God hath promised pardon to the penitent, but he has not promised to-morrow to the negligent. While you have time you may repent; but if you delay, when you would repent you may not have time." "Seek ye the Lord

while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near." "Walk while ye have the light lest darkness come upon you." "If thou hadst known, in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace ! But now they are hid from thine eyes."

Unspeakably precious is the present as the day of salvation—the day of preëminent privilege and possibility. In it—as has been well said by John Pulsford—"an appointed time is given for electing the principles of our life, and for getting them rooted and settled in us, as the foundation on which to build our eternal character." In the choices and actions of each passing hour eternal issues are wrapped up. The soul is now receiving an upward start in the path to eternal life, or a downward start in the path to eternal death. By slow, yet constant accretions a character is being formed which contains for its vital center "a self-hood without God, or a self-hood whose springs are in God." What the future will be, is being determined by the principles and habits which shape and control the present. As to-day is the harvest of all the yesterdays, the future is the harvest of all the present. Deep in every breast is planted the conviction that life is set in eternal relations. "God hath set eternity in the heart of man," * and thoughts of what is beyond

* Ecc. iii. 11.

cast their lights and shadows upon every part of the landscape of his life. Man is touched by the future. He lives in the shadow of the judgment-seat. Every atom of his conduct here is felt to have a practical bearing upon the hereafter. Earnests of the coming inheritance are already in his hand; within his conscience the fires of retribution are already kindled. Where holiness is there is heaven; where sin is there is hell.

Between the present and the future no hard-and-fast line can be drawn. They form distinct but united realms of the one King,—the gentle Lord of love who died upon the cross for man's offences. Death, the finale of life, marks the end of the one realm and the beginning of the other. In what respects the two realms are alike, and in what respects they differ; whether death is merely the end of the present term of moral education and trial, or whether it is the point at which the moral education and trial of every man cease forever, are questions upon which dogmatism is forbidden by the silence of Scripture. Of this only are we certain: the probation of man will stop when his moral education stops, and not before. When God ceases to sow he will cease to look for a harvest. And he will cease to sow only when he finds that the soil upon which his seed is thrown has become

petrified into unreceptive rock. In every instance the ceasing of divine saving effort is determined by the obduracy of the sinner. So that there is an important sense in which the day of salvation is the day of human persuadability, and the day of doom the day of human unpersuadability. In the final judgment the present epoch of redemption comes to an end; but it is a mistake to make the final judgment the crisis of destiny. The real crisis of destiny is reached when a soul has judged himself unworthy of eternal life, and God has confirmed his judgment.

Is the judgment passed by man upon himself, and confirmed by God, reversible? Is the final judgment of time, absolutely the final judgment; or is judgment a continuous process? Does probation end at death for all, or is it continued into the future world for any? Does moral choice go on forever betwixt the darkness and the light; or, does it take place in every life, once for all? These questions lead us among the mysteries, the full knowledge of which has not been given to mortal. Where knowledge fails we guess and hope. But, whatever room for uncertainty may be thought to exist as to whether *then* is the day of salvation, that *now* is the day of salvation admits of no uncertainty whatsoever. Short of the uttermost of human need the redemptive resources of the present never fail.

While life lasts man may reverse his self-pronounced sentence of condemnation, and be saved from his own undoing. Here, at least, faith and reason can firmly plant their feet. For think you that God would keep on the footstool of mercy, a rebel from whom his mercy was denied? Think you that he would ply with motives to repentance a heart that had lost the power to turn? Think you that he would prune and nourish a tree that was not merely barren but dead? Think you that he would keep under the ripening sun of his goodness a soul for whom nothing but the unquenchable fire was possible? Perish the thought!

Affirmations respecting the present life as a day of salvation leave every question touching the days that are yet to come, entirely open. It is the merest fragment of God's redemptive purpose that the Bible has revealed. What we see is only the swelling bud; the ripe fruit will come later on. Age will follow age, dispensation stretch on beyond dispensation until the harvest of all ages has been reaped, and the purpose of God completed. Then, but not till then can the success of the work of redemption be known.

Upon the dark background of awe and mystery which covers the future, one star shines brightly out; we know that God is love, and that nothing that love can do to conquer sin, or to restore the

sinner, will be left undone. Surprises may await us in the future world greater than any that have gladdened us on earth. The ocean of Infinite Mercy which from the beginning of time has been emptying itself into this world has not run dry. Christ has not loved his last; Calvary has not exhausted the saving power of the Divine Redeemer.

> "There is grace enough for thousands
> Of new worlds as bright as this."

And while Heaven's granaries are full to bursting will a single soul anywhere be left to starve? If we know not the future we know God, and in his hands we can well afford to leave all things, content to remain in ignorance concerning everything he has been pleased to hide from us; but confident that the perfect explanation which awaits us will put to shame every doubt with respect to his eternal goodness with which our faith on earth was shadowed.

The Bible itself professes to give only a partial unveiling of the future. It conceals much more than it reveals. It often places upon its utterances a wonderful restraint. When man with palpitating heart awaits an answer, the oracle is often dumb. As much as is necessary for practical purposes is given, and no more. The Bible is "a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto

the path," not a light that dazzles and blinds, but a twinkling foot-lamp that makes plain to the traveler the path of life and duty. Wide spaces are not illumined by it, but there is light sufficient to give direction to conduct in this work-a-day world. Those who follow it are made wise unto salvation, and are led at length into the glorious light of a new-born day, in which the dark clouds of earth melt into eternal sunshine; those who despise its guiding light lose their way, and wander aimlessly on, stumbling upon the dark mountains.

Every declaration to the effect that the present is a time of favor implies that in the experience of those who have not improved the opportunities of the present there will be a change for the worse. Delusive is the dream of the greater things which the future will do. No advantage can be offered in the future which is not held out in the present. Never can the Heavenly Father be more willing to save, never can Christ be more able to save than at the present moment. In the outgoing of redemptive effort, high-water-mark has been touched. The Omega of redemption has been uttered; atonement has been completed; the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh, in a flood of saving power. Nothing has been kept back. Heaven's treasury contains no more precious el than that which

has been given as the ransom-price of this lost world of ours. Divine love and power may keep on repeating themselves, but they can go further. A point of spiritual finality has been reached which makes the present "the day of Salvation," in a sense that no other day ever was. The utmost anticipation of the largest hope is that something of the grace of to-day may flow into the future. Nothing better than the Christ or Holy Spirit of the present is ever dreamed of. No resources can be available in the future surpassing those of the present. No firmer ground upon which to build the house not made with hands—the temple of a holy character—can be furnished by the future than that which the present affords. Contrariwise, all the surplus of advantage is on the side of the present. Can continued estrangement from God prepare for spiritual change? Can sinful habits be more easily uprooted the deeper they are fixed in the soil of a depraved heart? Can graduation in the school of Satan prepare for entrance into the school of Christ? Can the treasures of the present be flung away without incurring eternal loss? Can duty be delayed without danger? What is done in the way of moral reform, personal or general, must be done quickly. There is no time to lose. Day is vanishing; Night is approaching. Character is becoming stereotyped.

"There is an infinite voice in the sin and suffering of earth's millions which makes every idle moment guilt, and seems to cry out,—If you do not bestir yourself for love's sake now, it will soon be too late." Before the last sand runs through time's hour-glass; before the candle of hope flickers in its socket and expires; before the last page in life's book is reached, and the lids are closed, the work which the Father has given each one to do, must needs be accomplished. How important then, ere the sun goes down, to "buy up the opportunity!" What diversities of holy service the future life may bring, we know not; but it is certain that earth is the sphere, and death the limit of many distinctive forms of labor, which belong exclusively to the present epoch of redemption. Laborers are called into the vineyard up to the eleventh hour, but not after. When the Clock of Time points to the twelfth hour, the present day of gracious opportunity is over, the night has come when no man can work; and all neglected or unfinished tasks remain undone for ever.

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